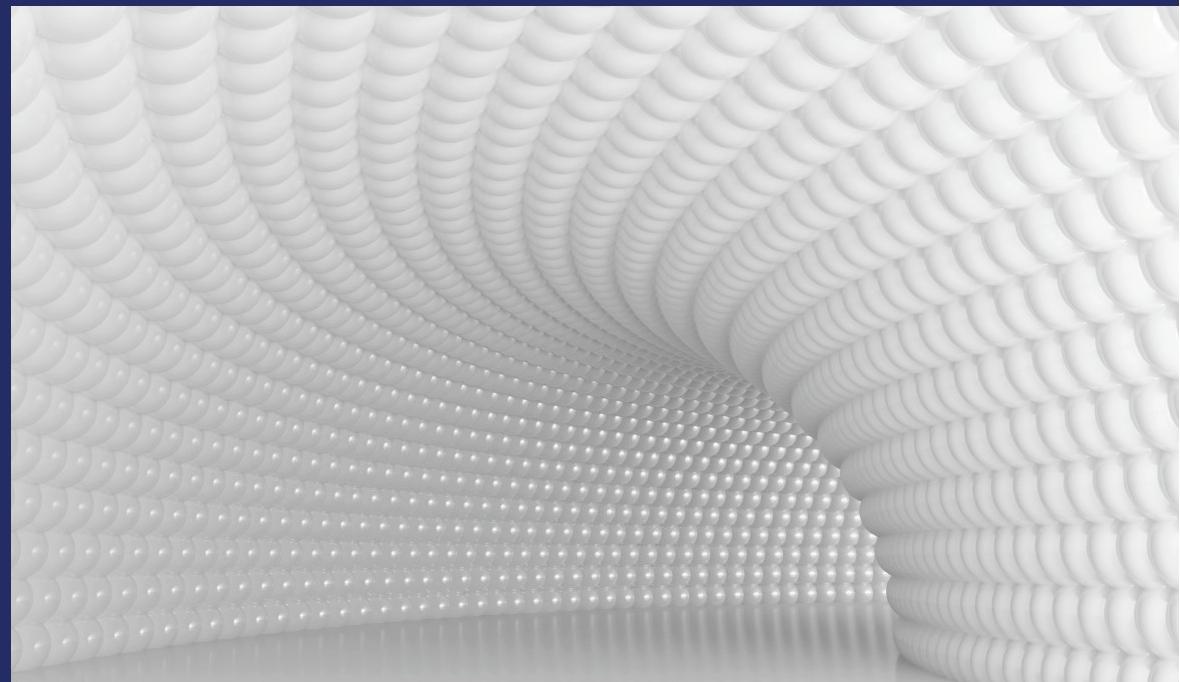
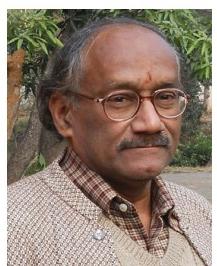


The growing interest in Indian English poetry provides me with an opportunity to reflect on what I have composed over the years via the interviews with various poet-friends, editors and scholars who tried to probe my creativity, life and mind from time to time. Though I value readers' autonomy in appreciation of a poem, my response to questions related to my own background, and certain themes and characteristics of my poems; my views, opinion and attitude to certain issues; my broad concerns and experiences; and other biographical queries may be helpful to researchers and students keen to academically explore my poetry. --Ram Krishna Singh

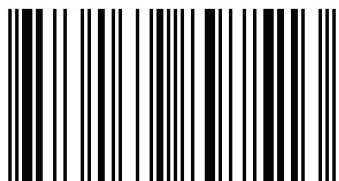
Reflections



Ram Krishna Singh



Ram Krishna Singh, an Indian English poet, has been writing for about four decades. Professionally, till recently, Professor at IIT-ISM in Dhanbad, India, he has published more than 160 research articles, 175 book reviews and 42 books.



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Singh

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**REFLECTIONS**

**R.K. SINGH'S POETRY AND SELF**

**Selected Interviews**

For Devansh, my grandson

## PREFACE

Life is too real to be believed, yet we must keep dreaming and try to live with a resonance of what we think while we touch various levels of reality—political, social, personal, or spiritual—and be ourselves.

Genuine poetry happens as an event to be truthful, clear, courageous, and honest to oneself; to be open about things one often tries to conceal. Poetry provides an opportunity for expressing ones intimate moments with the same passion as while talking about the interwoven outer realities.

My experience convinces me that we are not limited by what we are, but we are limited by what we are not. Poetry becomes a means to overcome this limitation, and thus, allows us not only to know ourselves but also to expand on what we are. This means we should remain open to healthy revisions that we can make to our way of thinking, and incorporate new perspectives into our outlook. In other words, we should not let our own rigidity destroy our potential, but rather we should evince a forward-looking, tolerant, and open mindset if we wish to create future.

I don't know if my poetry fits in what I think at the moment but poetry does help us traverse the boundaries of hesitation to see the joy of fulfillment.

The growing interest in Indian English poetry provides me with an opportunity to reflect on what I have composed over the years via the interviews with various poet-friends, editors and scholars who tried to probe my creativity, life and mind from time to time. Though I value readers' autonomy in appreciation of a poem, my response to questions related to my own background, and certain themes and characteristics of my poems; my views, opinion and attitude to certain issues; my broad concerns and experiences; and other biobibliographical queries may be helpful to researchers and students keen to academically explore my poetry.

If there are verbatim repetitions in the responses, it's simply because the questions had been the same, though asked by different persons, either by post or by email,

at different points of time. I often ‘copied and pasted’ my replies, without changing the words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs used once. And here, too, I have avoided editing the original questions or the replies that first appeared in magazines/journals.

**04 August 2018**

**--R.K. Singh**

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## 1.

### The Making of a Creative Artist

#### R K Singh: In Conversation with Abnish Singh Chauhan

**Ram Krishna Singh**, one of the most distinguished poets and critics of Indian Literature in English, was born on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1950 in Varanasi. He did his M.A. in English literature from Banaras Hindu University in 1972 and Ph.D. from now Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapath, Varanasi in 1981. In the beginning of his career, he worked as Compilation Officer in the District Gazetteers Department, Lucknow in 1973 and as a journalist with the Press Trust of India, New Delhi from 1973 to 1974. Then he switched his job and became Lecturer at the Royal Bhutan Polytechnic, Deothang, Bhutan for a period of two years. In 1976, he joined the Indian School of Mines in Dhanbad as Lecturer. In 1983 he was promoted to Assistant Professor and Head, and after a decade, he became full Professor and Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the same institution. He recently retired as Professor (HAG) from Indian School of Mines (now IIT), Dhanbad, Jharkhand, India.

R. K. Singh has authored more than 160 research articles and 175 book reviews. He has published 40 books, including: *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic (Criticism, 1984); My Silence (poems, 1985); Using English in Science and Technology (1988; rev. & rept. 2000; rev. & expanded, 2010; an EST textbook); Indian English Writing: 1981-1985: Experiments with Expression (1987; rept. 1991; ed. Critical essays); Recent Indian English Poets: Expressions and Beliefs (ed. Critical essays, 1992); Two Poets: R.K. Singh (I DO NOT QUESTION) Ujjal Singh Bahri (THE GRAMMAR OF MY LIFE) (poems, 1994); My Silence and Other Selected Poems : 1974-1994 (poems, 1996); Above the Earth's Green (poems, 1997); Anger in Action: Explorations of Anger in Indian Writing in English (ed. Critical essays, 1997); Psychic Knot: Search for Tolerance in Indian English Fiction (ed. Critical essays, 1998); New Zealand Literature: Some Recent Trends (ed. Critical essays, 1998); Every Stone Drop Pebble (haiku, 1999); Cover to Cover (poems, 2002); Pacem in Terris ( haiku, English and Italian, 2003); Communication : Grammar and Composition (textbook, 2003); Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: Essays on Love, Life and Death*

(2005); *Teaching English for Specific Purposes: An Evolving Experience* (2005); *Voices of the Present: Critical Essays on Some Indian English Poets* (2006); *The River Returns* (tanka and haiku collection, 2006); *Sexless Solitude and Other Poems* (2009); *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems* (2010); *New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku* (2012); *Indian Poetry in English: In Search of Identity* (coedited, 2012); *I Am No Jesus and Other Selected Poems, Tanka and Haiku* (2014), and *You Can't Scent Me and Other Selected Poems* (2016), etc.

His works have been anthologized in about 180 publications, while his editorial activities extend to include guest-editing of *Language Forum*, 1986, 1995, and *Creative Forum*, 1991, 1997, 1998, besides being Co-editor of the latter publication from 1987-90, General Editor of Creative Forum New Poets Series, and service on the editorial boards of various journals and magazines. He has evaluated about 50 Ph.D theses from various universities. Many awards and honours have been conferred on him: These include an Honorary Litt.D. from the World Academy of Arts and Culture, Taiwan (1984), Fellowship of the International Writers and Artists Association, USA (1988), Michael Madhusudan Award, Kolkata (1994), Ritsumeikan University Peace Museum Award, Kyoto (1999), Life Time Achievement Award of the International Poets Academy, Chennai (2009), Prize of Corea Literature Award, Seoul (2013), Nazar Look Prize for Poetry, Romania (2013), Naji Naaman's Literary Prize, Lebanon (2015), Aichi Prefecture Board of Education Award, Japan (2015), and Extraordinary Ambassador of Gratis Culture, FGC, Lebanon, 2016. His poems have been nominated for Pushcart Prize, 2013, 2014.

*He resides at J/4 (W), Rd. No.1/Block B, Vastu Vihar Colony, N H 2, Govindpur -828109 (Dhanbad), Jharkhand and can also be contacted at profrksingh@gmail.com*

**ASC:** Sir, you were born, brought up and educated in Varanasi—the seat of light and learning from the ancient times. How did it play its role in the formation of a silver tongue poet and rational critic in you?

**RKS:** A silver tongue poet? Hm... Thanks for the compliment Abnish. Varanasi is a complex city, a city of contradictions, even if it has ceased to be what it used to be in my formative years in the 1950s and 60s.

The city did influence my mental habits unconsciously, since I was born and raised in the lanes and by-lanes of its interior, with values such as freedom to think and pursue ones interests, tolerance for differences, broadness and openness of the mind, uninhibited sexpression, etc. The conscious creative influences must be the result of meeting many people, visiting various places, and experiencing life differently at different points of time. Also, reading and observing led to serious critical thinking, writing, debating, and corresponding. I had opportunities to work part-time and be independent to do whatever I liked. Besides writing poetry in Hindi, I had opportunities to reflect on contemporary issues and express myself in a couple of Hindi dailies and weeklies long before my graduation, just as I would actively participate in youth activities, debate and speech competitions, attend musical concerts, art exhibitions, poets' meet etc and publish reports/reviews.

The city engaged me better than the irrelevant routines of the high school, intermediate and degree colleges. The teachers disappointed me most, from childhood to boyhood to adulthood.

I must also admit that I was not uninfluenced by the chaos and crisis of the 1960s. As a youth I had no hope, no faith, no trust in the system, nor did I know the direction of life. It was living in constant tension about the future. In fact it was a lonely struggle vis-à-vis the glaring waste of time in college and university. Given my anti-establishment attitude, I was not confident that I could ever get a job or have a career. Failure and frustration loomed large. Poetry was the only solace.

**ASC:** Sir, you started your career as a journalist. The job of a journalist always requires honesty, hard work, quality writing and the courage to tell the truth. But, just after a year or two you changed your job and adopted the teaching profession,

which also demands proper understanding of the subject matter, wide interest, helpful attitude, love for learning, skills of classroom management and a desire to make a difference in the lives of the taughts. How much are these experiences constructive in communicating your vision and mission in your literary works and academic writings?

**RKS:** As I said, as a student I had very poor opinion of my teachers. I had no interest in teaching as a career, but Professor S M Pandeya, who supervised my M A thesis, insisted that I should not be drawn to the glitters of journalism, and rather take up teaching as a profession. He even helped me get the first job as a lecturer in a college in Pulgaon by writing to O P Bhatnagar, who later became a life-long friend. I was 21 years old, wanted to do Ph D in American literature from Nagpur or Bombay university, but the management won't let me go to meet the faculty there. I resigned the job in less than six months and came back home.

After a year (or more) of unemployment—a period I spent with Dr B Chakroverty, learning the finer nuances of literary criticism (he was writing a book on Tagore, the dramatist)—I joined the District Gazetteers Dept in Lucknow as Compilation Officer. The U.P. Government's job entailed revising and updating the old gazetteers.

I ignored the offer of working in IIT, Kanpur as a junior lecturer. It came just around the time I had made up my mind to work in Lucknow.

In the mean time, I was also selected as a journalist trainee in The Press Trust of India, New Delhi, and was keen to join the position. However, my IAS bosses in the Gazetteers Dept (as also my parents) dissuaded me, but seeing my enthusiasm, they released me, with the kind option to return to the post if not satisfied at PTI within three months.

I was happy to join my dream profession, despite monetary loss and hardships of living in Delhi. But soon I discovered I was a misfit there. I couldn't suffer the envious colleagues and their dubious designs and practices, and so, I finally decided to quit, as soon as I got an offer from the newly set-up Royal Bhutan Polytechnic, Deothang (E. Bhutan).

I was back to teaching, which now appeared more convenient, but very demanding. The direction of my career was clear: I would professionally practice ELT/ESP, but personally pursue literature, especially Indian English poetry, and promote new/less known poets and authors by reviewing their books, writing articles about their work, and editing books and journals. It was challenging but rewarding. Learning by doing, you know. It is this that made me known all over, from a small place like Dhanbad. Indeed, all this needs a lot of labour and commitment, as you rightly observed.

**ASC:** Sir, how do you summon your emotions and experiences for composing a poem or other work of art? Do you respond to urgency, stipulation or passion for creative writings, which seems as real, animated and impressive as the rest of the world?

**RKS:** To tell you the truth, most of the poems I wrote have simply happened. The poetic mood, short-lived as it is, would help create from anything, anywhere, anytime. I can't write a poem deliberately on a theme on demand. Nor have I been interested in didactic or moralistic writing. My emotions and experiences are, therefore, genuine and sympathetic readers can relate to them.

Personally speaking, a poem's composition helps me get a release from myself as much as from others or whatever agitates me. I feel free by unburdening myself in verses; I experience an inner relief, a freedom from the built-up pressure, tension,

unease, or whatever, you know. If it turns out to be a good poem, it offers a pleasing sensation, rest to my disturbed nerves, and peace to my inner being.

**ASC:** Sir, you have been regularly writing poetry with social, cultural, spiritual, ethical, mythical, erotic and aesthetic perceptions for the international audiences with the universal lessons of truth, love, compassion, pity, peace and harmony. How do you secure and evolve selfhood along with worldhood in your poetry amidst the fast changing societies and their value-systems?

**RKS:** Thanks for summarizing well the essential nature of my poems. I, too, think it is broad enough to appeal to audiences everywhere. Human nature is same, whatever culture, society or country, and I have tried to express what people experience universally. I don't seek the sublime or great or ideal, you see. I am rooted in my basic nature, which has been evolving. When effective, one can physically feel it, I mean, the poet's emotion or psychosexual sensation, and partake of his self.

There is poetry in the subtlety of awareness, as you will also agree. I feel myself in words that acquire their own existence in the process of making, in a form I may have no control over, given the pressure or urgency to express the momentness of a moment as lived, perceived, or experienced in the continuity of memory. My selfhood extends to worldhood in my expression in a timeless frame of a moment inheriting the pressure of the struggle for survival, search for meaning or purpose in an otherwise very negative, frustrating, disappointing, painful existence, or social reality, if you so like.

**ASC:** Sir, when you talk about (even question) sense, silence, solitude, love and sex amidst the sound and serenity of pebbles, stones, rivers and the flora and fauna of the mother earth, you imbibe and inculcate man and Nature in your poetry, which is clearly recognized and understood by your readers. In spite of that, why

do you rhetorically proclaim- ‘I Do Not Question’ (1994) and ‘You Can’t Scent me’ (2016)?

**RKS:** The answer lies in your question itself: it’s rhetorical. Philosophically, a straight forward observation of the Purush-Prakriti or Yin-Yang consciousness vis-à-vis the monotony of existence. I seek meaning of the mystery of life, its reality and pains through the eyes of Nature, metaphors of self-contradictions, intrinsic dissonance, or search for harmony and identity.

Having said this, let me also add a word of caution. I’m very poor at titling my poems. In fact I don’t believe in giving a title to my poem, nor do I give a title while composing it. Titles tell too much. In my volume of *Collected Poems*, you’ll find no title, unless extremely necessary for identification or other structural reasons (as in Haiku/Tanka sequences).

Without titles, the poems give readers more freedom to make their own meaning and relate to their own experiences, different from the poet’s.

**ASC:** In one of your interviews, you have exhorted— ‘As a poet, if I use human passion, including the sexual, I try to transmute and transmit memories of experience, possibly more with a sense of irony than erotic sexuality.’ Hence, do you think that your sexual passion expressed in your poetry is meant only for creating a sense of irony—a popular technique of poetic communication or it also stands for something else?

**RKS:** Sex is eternal, unchanging over time and culture. It is the basic principle of life and creation. Its expression, therefore, calls for celebration. It is central to social harmony, emotional pleasure, and inner peace. It is not devoid of sensibility. The metaphors of sex reveal our social consciousness, our inner mind, our hidden

reality. Our sexual passion is the mirror reflecting the spiritual passion; the body reveals the soul. One needs to appreciate it and relate to the pragmatics of my communication. While Jindagi Kumari's 'The Poetics of R.K. Singh' is a helpful essay in this respect, Raghuvanshmani Tripathi's 'The Asexuality of Sex: A Study of Sex Expression in R.K. Singh's Poetry' should enlighten a sympathetic reader further.

**ASC:** You wrote the paradox in your poem 'Degeneration'— 'I can't change man or nature, nor the karmas/ now or tomorrow they all delude/ in the maze of expediency and curse/ stars, fate, destiny, or life before and after/ degenerating the mind, body, thought, and divine.' Do they survive because they bring degeneration, and ultimately death? If so, no hope, no dream, no joy and no future?

**RKS:** As a poet I would prefer to refrain from interpreting my own poem for readers. I would rather leave it to them to make sense of it anyway they like. I don't question unless it is deliberately personally offending...But, let me see it again. Firstly, the hang of the poem 'Degeneration' was added when I posted it online, or submitted it to some e-journal, I don't remember now. Secondly, it was my own 'degeneration' – physical, mental, financial and spiritual—that afflicted my mood in June 2014 when I wrote it. Things were looking blue—the envious hostility of my junior colleagues who freely distorted facts and told outright lies, the deteriorating health condition, the bad time predicted by astrologers, and tall claims of prophet friends, tarot-card readers and fortune tellers on the net, seeking money to turn the wheel of time in my favour. Their expectation from me had in-built irony in that I couldn't compromise my realization that best things in life come free. But people are as they are—out to grab wealth, favour, profit, promotion, whatever—by cheating, telling lies, weaving dreams, or stabbing in the back. They suffer. I can't change my nature, and my adversaries can't change their nature. Ultimately we are all subjected to our own karmas, our destiny, or the forces of Nature. No use cursing or abusing, if we delude ourselves. The plain truth is: if we are dishonest to ourselves, we suffer all round degeneration in the

maze of our own making. The poem, however, preaches nothing, except showing a condition. The readers can draw their own conclusions.

**ASC:** Sir, what is your favorite technique (s) of protest against the anomalies/grave issues of the world, partly created by highly advanced machines and electronic devices and partly by man himself?

**RKS:** As I told you just now, portray the picture, or create the image of what obtains, and leave the rest to the readers' imagination, or decision, if you like. No advice, no judgment. New technologies have thrown up new issues, new norms, new values. The important thing now is to communicate, to interact, to talk about whatever issues or values bother you as an individual. You can't live by your prejudices or traditional ideas alone, if you hope to be relevant. The new age demands new language, new expression, new metaphors. You will discover the new technique to protest too. But, let's come out of the shackles of our own making, first.

**ASC:** Sir, how do you characterize your Haiku and Tanka? Are they influential and beneficial to the masses to a large extent or only popular among and practiced by some selected people, especially the poets and a few others?

**RKS:** Let's be clear about certain basics. Haiku is a difficult genre. It is miniature poetry, a sketch of a moment's experience, to be filled out by the reader. It does not use sentences, nor the devices of Western poetry, nor shares its use of the sentimental and simile—preferring always contact with the real—the things of Nature and the spirit of Nature herself, the perception experience. It is down to earth; expression of *what is*—what you see and hear and touch; the thing itself, not a poetic or literary or philosophical view of it. In haiku we don't elaborate or

explain, only sketch our experience of the moment. ‘Haiku moment’ is the great secret.

It took me years of preparation and practice to be able to give expression to sudden or subtle moments of awareness into the nature of passing time. As H.F. Noyes commented, reading some of my haiku, simplicity and lightness should be the aim of all haiku, and detachment is desirable in our way of looking at things--detachment, selflessness, and a sense of our oneness with all life. It is achieving the union of our minds with nature, or being in league with the five elements. It is essentially spiritual. There is God’s abundance to feel in the three lines. The briefer you become, the nearer you are to silence.

I have tried to express sensuousness in haiku. After all, it’s not just seeing and hearing that offer us reality, but touch as well.

Another Japanese poetry form, Tanka is a typical lyric poem of feeling and ideas, often involving figurative language, not used in haiku. You can say it is like a ‘long haiku’ in five lines. It addresses varied aspects of contemporary living. It shares the basic qualities of all successful poems.

But if you’re a poet, writing haiku and tanka too much can suppress some of your true poetic instincts, even if their practice should improve the quality of expression of Indian English poets. It will ensure a sense of rhythm and prevent waste of words. Many of my poems have haiku and tanka structure as stanzas.

**ASC:** W H Auden said, ‘Poetry makes nothing happen. One is deluded if one believes that one can actually preserve the world in words, but one is just playing games if one doesn’t try.’ Do you agree with him? If yes, why; if no, why not?

**RKS:** I don't know the context in which Auden said this, but I, too, doubt poetry can make anything happen. It can't mould a society by itself. It has no utilitarian function. As I said elsewhere, it can at best create some awareness, hone some finer feelings, present some specialist perceptions, reflect one's mind and soul, remain part of cultural activities and a form of literary communication. But it can't make anything happen.

Personally, I don't practice poetry with any idealistic notion. Nor do I share the view that poetry can teach one about ethics, morality, history, politics, or revolution. It is no means for social salvation either. It might assimilate, inhere or portray a degenerating situation, but it can't change it. My poetry commits no such obligation. Nor can poetry or criticism become a basis for societal reform.

**ASC:** Sir, you have been associated with the editorial activities, evaluation work of research projects and book reviews throughout your academic/literary career. Most of the times, it is observed that the authors/ researchers manipulate (also copy, cut and paste) ideas and concepts and produce them in their works. How do you, as a critic, examine and respond to such works?

**RKS:** What you say is true. It is indeed very disappointing that there is so much 'recycling' of material going on in the name of research. Scholars tend to practice short-cuts, but it is the job of the guides/supervisors and seniors to help them improve their language and literary abilities, particularly research writing skills, and make them read, interpret and evaluate the original texts. If the seniors are badly trained, their scholars will depend on, what you call, manipulation of all sorts.

To minimize this, scholars are now expected to publish research papers in standard national/foreign/Thomson-Reuter listed journals before submitting their theses just as the teachers are considered eligible for promotion only when they have

publications in standard journals. We need to be sympathetic but tough in this respect. Let's hope things improve in the years ahead.

**ASC:** Sir, your poetry has been translated into Italian and a few other languages of the world. Translation (also other creative works) is not an easy task. It requires proper understanding of the language, its socio-cultural references, trends and tendencies along with the mind and motives of the author. How much is it effective and satisfactory when the readers are less engaged and little interested in the translated works?

**RKS:** My poems have been translated not only into Italian but also into Greek, Japanese, Chinese, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Irish, Turkish, Romanian, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, Slovene, Croatian, Korean, Arabic, Farsi, Serbian, Esperanto, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Kannada, and Bangla. I hardly know any of the translators personally, but the availability of my poems online has helped me reach out to a larger audience. The translators must have negotiated the difficulties you mention—I can't comment, for I do not know all these languages (except Hindi).

The problem with most of us is that we don't read. We don't care to appreciate others, except ourselves. We don't bother to study and critique the fellow-travelers but expect from them to read and write about us. Additionally, because we write in English, some of us in the academia expect the native speakers of English to pat us; we value their comments/opinions, and down-rate the observations by the fellow Indians, young or old. Also, most of us don't encourage serious academic research in writings of the new or less known Indian English authors, self-published or published by the small press. In such a situation, how do you expect translations to be undertaken or studied?

We as academics need to change our attitude if we want to be accepted within our own country, first. We can reach out to a larger audience via translation only if we accept the fact that people's tastes in poetry differ widely, and most Indian poetry in English is generally considered naïve or oversweet. Not many literary magazines will publish translation, unless it is professionally done and it reads as good as the original (or better than the original). We need to handle several issues academically first... Frankly, I have more problems with the self-styled experts and dons than with the poets and writers who spend their own hard-earned money to publish their books and bear the cost of sharing these with them.

**ASC:** Sir, often it is observed that the publication and publicity (including critical appreciation) of literature are based on contact, relation, power and position. How far is it true and how can genuine authors rise and grow in such circumstances?

**RKS:** Internet has proved a great blessing. The age of all those few great names in Indian English writing that have been repeatedly studied and explored for academic degrees is over. Now is the time to discover new names; study new authors, new voices. We have to prove that Indian English writing is viable, potent and worth studying; that there is something different about it; that it exists and is growing. Your *Creation and Criticism* is doing that, isn't it?

The institution I worked in Dhanbad is not a mainstream university, yet I could make worldwide publications from early 1980s almost regularly, without any personal contact, relation, or support. I had no short cuts except hard work, clear vision, and passion. You can see from my List of Publications how many new poets (who are now relatively better known) I talked about, not only from our country but also from outside.

When no computer or laptop was available, I would type out my manuscripts on my old typewriter and approach editors and publishers without any backing. Slowly I made my impact, despite apathy from the likes of Ezekiel, Mahapatra, Shiv K Kumar, and all those Bombay poets. I could ruthlessly challenge anyone because I never needed them for any personal favour, whatever my position. They didn't know ESP and I didn't care to know them (or their writings) till I started the MPhil/PhD programmes at ISM.

In fact, I won't have time, motivation, or leave from the institution, to attend conferences, or visit other universities and develop personal relationship, except through letters. Yet, I achieved what I wanted to, and reached the highest in the academic rung, without any personal contact. Believe me, a good work will speak for itself, if one is honest and working hard. Unfortunately, in most cases today, the quality is lacking, just as friends don't want to see beyond themselves.

**ASC:** Sir, what is the role of social media, especially Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp, in promoting and presenting literature online when a few followers and fellow-travelers (online friends) just 'like' (though most of the times ignore the post), remark- 'congratulation/ best wishes/ wow/ thanks/ excellent/ amazing and so on' or rarely make some serious comment (s) on the post?

**RKS:** I view social media as a positive development for poets and writers to be noted, even if the members' 'viewing' does not necessarily mean a post's 'reading', or their 'likes' hardly imply something serious, except a confirmation that they saw it. If no comments are offered, it does not mean the post has ceased to exist. One's presence on Facebook, twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+, youtube, tumblr etc helps in reaching out internationally. You can develop contacts here. The search engines record what you do on these sites. It's a matter of time, opportunity, and a little bit of luck when your work is searched or discovered by interested readers, scholars, editors, or publishers.

**ASC:** Sir, now-a-days, prizes, awards, honors are more lucrative and valuable than before as per the mind-set of the public. If an author is conferred with them, he is accepted and appreciated not only in the literary arena but also out of it. How do you perceive the politics of prize and placement of the author in the present scenario?

**RKS:** It is no doubt motivating to be honored with some prize or recognition. Better keep from it, if it comes with politics. It is also wasteful if it comes after paying money, for whatever reasons.

However, if the mainstream media – TV, newspapers, learned societies, government bodies, or publishing houses—and academia ignore me or you, it doesn't mean we don't exist. It's a matter of time till we are discovered by interested readers, researchers, scholars, editors, or publishers at home or abroad. We need to keep patience and continue to do what we are doing. This is what is the biggest reward in itself in the IT-dominated present time.

**ASC:** Sir, do you have any desire left to be fulfilled in the coming years or fully satisfied with your *karmas* of an author?

**RKS:** Though I have minimized my academic activities and stopped teaching after retirement last December, I continue to be active as a poet and wish to be recognized as such by the mainstream media and academia. As it is, I am afraid I continue to write from the margin, and I hope, in the days ahead more scholars and critics would study and explore my poetry to strengthen creation and criticism.

**ASC:** Sir, would you please share your opinions about *Creation and Criticism*—the literary e-journal of English Language and Literature?

**RKS:** The e-journal is a happy development in the annals of literary publications, both creative and critical, from India. Both you and Sudhir Arora have been doing very well as editors just as your claim to be friendly to researchers and scholars is justified. The site is indeed very friendly. Kudos. You have already broken away from the past and hopefully both of you will reach much higher.

Let the journal promote studies on **native** Indian English poets and authors who have been active for decades from the periphery and suffering colonialist treatment in a post-colonialist environment, even after the maturity of Indian English. Let them not find themselves deprived despite merits; let them not rot in anonymity or degenerate in the politics of belonging. Let us discover (or re-discover) the neglected and promising good poets and writers and contribute to the development of art and criticism from the perspectives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century scholarship. God bless.

**ASC:** Thank you very much for your interesting and enlightening conversation.

**RKS:** It's my pleasure.

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<http://creationandcriticism.com/113.html>]

Abnish Singh Chauhan, Managing Editor of *Creation and Criticism* and Editor of *International Journal of Higher Education and Research* ([www.ijher.com](http://www.ijher.com)), is a bilingual poet, critic and translator (Hindi and English). A faculty at SRM University, he has been teaching English and Communication Skills to both Undergraduate and Post graduate students for the last 10 years. His significant books include *Swami Vivekananda: Select Speeches, Speeches of Swami Vivekananda and Subhash Chandra Bose: A Comparative Study, King Lear: A Critical Study, Functional Skills in Language and Literature, Functional English, The Fictional World of Arun Joshi: Paradigm Shift in Values* and *Tukda Kagaz Ka* (Hindi Lyrics). He lives in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

## 2.

### Bilingualism is a strength

#### Professor R. K. Singh interviewed by Patricia Prime

Ram Krishna Singh was born in 1950 in Varanasi, India. He is a university professor, Indian English poet, critic and reviewer. He received an M.A. (English Lit., Banaras Hindu University, 1972) and PhD. (English, Kashi Vidyapith, 1981). Dr. Singh has been on the faculty of the Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, since 1976 and teaching English language skills to students of earth and mineral sciences. He is married to Durga Singh and has two children, Vikram and Winny. Professor Singh has published more than 130 research articles, 140 book reviews, and 26 books, including ten collections of poems. His major collections have been well received and include: *My Silence and Other Selected Poems: 1974-1994* (1996), *Above the Earth's Green* (1997), *Every Drop Stone Pebble* (1999, jointly with Catherine Mair and Patricia Prime), *Cover to Cover* (2002, jointly with U. S. Bahri) and *Pacem in Terris* (2003, jointly with Myriam Pierri and Giovanni Campisi). His poems have also appeared in over 125 anthologies and 170 journals and e-zines.

Below is an example of R. K. Singh's poetry for readers who may not be familiar with his work. It is taken from *Above the Earth's Green* (1997):

there is a bay in  
each of us depression mounts  
to cause hurricane

crumbling caged life and  
its traps submerged in rising  
water and wind wipes

pressure in silence

unweave years of network  
roots of upturned faces

**PP: When did you first start writing?**

**RKS:** I think it just happened when I was hardly 12 and wrote my first poem in Hindi: it appeared in the children's magazine section of the daily *Aj* (Varanasi). I dabbled in several poems and succeeded in publishing them in Hindi newspapers and magazines. I also published over 150 journalistic articles besides around ten short stories in Hindi up to 1971-72. As I became aware that my articles were more popular than the poems, from 1968-69, I started writing in English as well, and produced a large number of third-rate verses.

As the influence of the Romantic, Victorian and Modern poets waned, the phase of 'preparation' completed with my attempt at writing my 'diary' in verse from October 1972 to December 1973. There was a lot to feel and say after leaving the monotonous life at Varanasi, and going to Pulgaon (to teach) and returning again and visiting several places (in search of a job), going to Lucknow (to work in the Gazetteers Dept.), New Delhi (as a journalist trainee), and finally to Bhutan (as lecturer) where from March 1974 to November 1975, I composed almost a poem a day. It's a different matter, in retrospect, that very few of the poems could be published.

**PP: Which Indian poets/writers have most influenced your work?**

**RKS:** I don't know. I doubt I have read many established poets with a view to emulating them. I give credit to none for influencing my work, but I did enjoy the work of Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, A. K. Coomarswamy, S. Radhakrishnan, Jawaharlal Nehru, M. K. Gandhi, Nirad C. Chaudhury, Nissam Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Shiv K. Kumar, Krishna Srinivas, Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam, et al.

**PP: Which European poets/writers do you most admire?**

**RKS:** Frankly speaking, after becoming a teacher I couldn't get much free time to read writers outside my limited academic and professional concerns. But till my early twenties, I could read with great interest Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Ibsen, Chekhov, Gorky, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Pushkin, Mayakovski, Vladimir Nabokov, Ivan Illich, Herbert Marcuse, Satre, Herbert Read, Baudelaire, Mallarme, Kenneth Clark, Marshall McLuhan, Albert Camus, Fritjof Capra, Somerset Maugham, Pablo Neruda, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Northrop Frye, Murray Krieger, and my American poet friend, Lyle Glazier. There are others too, but I can't readily recall their names.

**PP: In what way did the move into another language and culture influence your writing?**

**RKS:** Human nature is the same everywhere, so it hardly affects me when I move from my Indian culture into the English speaking culture and verbally share what is our common experiences, feelings, attitudes, fears, expectations etc. I seek to express something universal just as when I write in English, I think in English, remaining my own true self. As I said elsewhere I am my own veil and revelation and as long as my poems read well, it's o.k.

**PP: Has bilingualism influenced the way in which you write?**

**RKS:** I have not written in Hindi in the last three decades. Writing in English poses no problem: it comes to me naturally, easily, and conveniently. But, if at times, there is any unconscious influence, well, it should be more enriching than negative. For a writer bilingualism/multilingualism is a strength.

**PP: How does that kind of compromised relationship with language relate to your connection with two cultures, as an individual, and as a writer?**

**RKS:** There is no ‘compromised relationship’ as such. I have been writing in English by choice. But, don’t you think the geographical spread of English both as an international and international language has strengthened global integration? The acculturation, the international functional range, and the diverse forms of literary creativity the English language accommodates today is unprecedented. I am happy as a poet to be contributing towards it. There is no cultural conflict or tension in my use of English. Let me also remind you what George Steiner said about 25 years ago: “To know another language well, to penetrate the reflexes of awareness and judgement in its idioms, to experience in personal immediacy the transparencies or opaqueness which link or divide it from one’s native speech, to do these things is, quite literally, to harvest a second self. It is to open a second window on the landscape of being.”

**PP: As an individual, do you see a kind of gap opening up between your native culture and language and the adopted one of English?**

**RKS:** As I indicated, since the English language as a medium has been an integral part of my environment, it doesn’t interfere with the native culture as such. Whatever is culturally relevant in the local situation happens in the local/native medium, without any problem, even if one used English most of the time, including at home. In fact, English has already been well acculturated in the native environment and if one sees any gap, it is merely political. However, as an individual poet, I may not be accessible to the audience not knowing English.

**PP: Would you describe yourself principally as an academic writer, a reviewer, a poet, or critic, or perhaps all of the above?**

**RKS:** Presently, perhaps, all of the above. But I have always tried to keep the academic writer separate from the creative poet in me, though when I review, or do a critical article, the academic in me is also working.

Yet I must admit I have always tried to maintain a balance between my academic activities that give me my bread and professional status, and poetic creativity that gives me an identity in Indian English writing but no money. As I hope I will continue to write and practise poetry, I should be principally known as a poet.

**PP: What criteria do you think makes a good critic?**

**RKS:** A good critic, besides knowing the subject matter, is also a sensitive reader with broadness of outlook, understanding, tolerance, sensibility, and vision. He/she is free from prejudices and able to empathise, recognise, and respond. He/she is free from rigid literary orthodoxies and capable of negotiating differences and facilitating communication. The critic should help to develop reason, emotions, senses and tastes to a great measure, by researching art, re-viewing media and meaning, re-making minds, re-thinking aesthetics and traditions, re-imaging the past, re-interpreting the present. The good critic is essentially creative and contributes to knowledge in a positive, future-looking mode.

**PP: What criteria do you think makes a good reviewer?**

**RKS:** Almost the same as what makes a good critic. Empathy, recognition, and responsiveness are the basic traits of a good reviewer, too. The reviewer must have faith in the author and view his/her work in the present. He/she

need not be a scholar, but able to communicate the author's text and context with a view to objective presentation. He/she must be able to negotiate between the author and the reader and provide a reasonable critical space to appraise the former, who may be different from the reader, culturally, socially and politically.

**PP: As a writer of various genres, and different cultures, which particular books have influenced you?**

**RKS:** Though the Holy Bible has been most inspiring, I can't recall what specially I read at different points of time that might have influenced my work. Most of the time I read a book or article or poem, enjoy it, and forget about it, looking for something new or fresh. If it is informative, I may take notes, if it is creatively thrilling, it may incite me into writing a poem. So, if one finds any influence in my work, it should be a collective influence rather than an individual influence. Also, I have no patience for a long work, so I hardly read it, unless academically/professionally necessary. My involvement has been more with poetry, mostly by new/less known people, irrespective of the country or culture of origin.

**PP: When did you first become interested in writing haiku and tanka?**

**RKS:** I think my first exposure to haiku was via the haiku/translations by Ezra Pound in one of the books of his collected poems in the late 1970s. I used to see haiku in Poet (Madras) also, but I couldn't understand it much till about 1981-82 when I started using 5-7-5 stanza structure in my poems. Occasionally I wrote haiku, senryu and tanka from 1983 onwards and published them in various journals in India and abroad, but I developed a serious interest in its art and craft from about the early 1990s and subsequently published some of them in *Prophetic Voices*, *Noreal*, *Manxa*, *Azami*, *Micropress NZ*, *Micropress Yates*, *WinterSpin*, *La Pierna Tierna*, *Creative Forum*, *Poet*, *Poetcrit*, *Skylark*, *Sparrow*, *Paper Wasp*, *RAW NeRVZ*, *Mirror*, *Lilliput Review*, *Hobo*, *Forum*, *Puck and Pluck*, *Kanora*, *Moongate*, *Simply Words*, *Timber Creek Review* Cer\*ber\*us, etc.

Thanks go to Sid (Mohammed H. Siddiqui of Baltimore, USA), who exposed me to quality haiku writing through his liberal gift of the copies of *Frogpond*, *Modern Haiku*, *Haiku Headlines*, *Lynx*, *American Tanka*, *Tanka Splendor*, *Tanka Journal* etc., and above all, his own theme-based selections of Seasonal Haiku Greetings (*SGL*) that he has been mailing to friends all over the world since 1990.

Credit also goes to you, Pat, for helping me understand haiku, senryu and tanka so that we could publish our joint collection *Every Stone Drop Pebble* (1998).

David McMurray of asahi.com has also helped me to write haiku in 3-5-3 syllables. My latest collection of haiku ‘Peddling Dreams’ in *Pacem in Terris* (2003) reveals the variety in my three-liners.

Below are two examples of R. K. Singh’s 3-5-3 haiku taken from *Pacem in Terris* (2003):

Rain-soaked sun  
sheds its sultry light :  
her bare back

Face hidden  
at the window hear  
known voices

**PP: How does this short form of Japanese poetry find expression in your work in progress?**

**RKS:** Because I have been mostly writing brief personal lyrics for the last 25 years, and because I love personal poetry, I have found the Japanese verse forms in English suited to my temperament. In fact, in most of my regular poems, the haiku rhythm should be easily discernable. It seems to have been the basic unit of my poetical expression.

**PP: What do you think your aim or goal is as a writer?**

**RKS:** To have a sense of relief, or feeling of emancipation to feel lighter when the tension is resolved with the birth of a poem or article. And, if the poem pleases the readers, or the article motivates them I feel blessed. I don't think I write with any idealistic notion.

But if you are referring to my academic writing, or research or teaching, then, the aim is to demonstrate or achieve a higher level of professionalism.

I am also committed to promote a study of new/less known Indian English authors that have been ignored by the media and academia alike.

**PP: What is next on your agenda as a writer?**

**RKS:** To have a collection of my tanka published as early as possible. I would also like to bring out a collection of my regular poems besides a collection of essays on my poetry to help interested scholars probe my creativity in perspective. The manuscript is already lying with a publisher, but let me see when it sees the light of day.

**PP: And what more long-term projects or interests do you have?**

**RKS:** To reach out to a larger audience as a poet; to motivate scholars to study new/less known/ neglected Indian English poets and authors; and to promote collaborative literary practices internationally.

**PP: What do you think is the status of an interview like this, and its format?**

**RKS:** It's an exercise in international/cross-cultural mediation, which exposes a relatively less known author to new audiences. It should also help in promoting global understanding and integration.

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Patricia Prime, a leading haiku and tanka poet, is co-editor of the New Zealand haiku magazine, *Kokako*, reviews/interviews editor of *Haibun Today*, and writes reviews for *Takahe*, *Gusts* and *Atlas Poetica*, and for several Indian magazines. She has interviewed poets and editors for *Takahe* and for the online magazines *Haiku NewZ*, *Simply Haiku*, *Haibun Today*, *Stylus*, and for many print journals. Her published haiku, tanka and other poetry collections include *East Cape*, *Stolen Time*, *Morning Glory*, *Sweet Penguins*, *The Place Where*, *Every Drop Stone Pebble* and *Accepting Summer*. She recently retired from teaching in an early childhood center.

**3.**

**Haiku is a difficult genre to practice**

**Tatjana Debeljački vs. Ram Krishna Singh**

**1. Can you tell us something about your hometown and growing up?**

Thanks for getting in touch with me, Tatjana. I come from a humble family of Banares, now Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. (Recently, it has been in the news for being the constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visit of dignitaries from various countries, including the Prime Minister of Japan.) For generations my forefathers had lived in the narrow lanes and alleys of the ancient city, and I, too, was born, brought up and educated there, partaking of a culture which flourished on the bank of the Ganges that still attracts everyone, though the uniqueness is gone, values, norms, beliefs and body politic have changed so much that whenever I go home I find myself out of place.

As my grandfather was a freedom fighter, frequently imprisoned along with other Congress Party leaders in Banares, my father could not have formal education. He learnt to survive by himself, learnt to read and write and did many petty jobs before he could settle down in life as an accountant. He recognized the value of education. I was the eldest of his eight children who are all postgraduates and/or doctorates and fiercely independent in their views and thinking. When I was hardly ten or so, my father ensured that during the summer vacation I should learn some skills and earn too. I learnt typewriting and worked part-time as a typist during the 1960s. The skill later helped me type my postgraduate and doctoral dissertations, and manuscripts of several of my books and academic articles for publication.

Though I started my career as a journalist, I switched over to teaching, finding it more congenial, and now, away from my roots in the interiors of Varanasi, I have been living in Dhanbad since February 1976. It is here, after joining Indian School of Mines as a faculty, that I was married in 1978, blessed with two children (who are now well settled, my son is Colonel in the Army, and my daughter is Manager in a pharmaceutical company), and I have been able to establish myself as an academic, and perhaps, poet too.

## **2. When did you start to write and what inspires you?**

In the early 1960s, I think. I remember writing my first poem at the age of 12 in 1962. The poem appeared in a Hindi daily, *Aj*, of Varanasi. My interest and enthusiasm never waned since then: I dabbled in several poems and published in newspapers and magazines. From 1965 to 1972, I even participated in a few ‘Kavi Sammelans’ (Poets’ meet) also. I had adopted ‘Tahira’ as my pen name in Hindi. I remember I used to do a column ‘Tahira ki Kalam Se’ (From the Pen of Tahira) in a Hindi weekly. I also published over 150 journalistic articles as well as about ten short stories in Hindi till about 1971-72. As I became aware that my articles were more popular than my poems, from 1968-69, I started writing in English as well, and produced a large number of third-rate verses. Probably the first poem in English composed in 1968 appeared in the Deutsche Welle radio magazine. A couple of my early poems also appeared in *Adam & Eve* (Madras). It was a great feeling to have been paid for those poems.

My teachers in Banaras Hindu University, where I was a student of M.A. (English Literature) from 1970-72, dissuaded me from writing poems in English but I persisted in my efforts at developing the art and craft in keeping with my sensibility, and I am happy to discover that what I could not do in Hindi (which is indeed now very advanced and comparable with literature in any other language) I have been successful in doing in English.

Before I try to answer the other part of your question, what inspires me to write, let me look back to my writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the influence of the Romantic, Victorian and Modern poets in English waned, this phase of preparation was completed with my attempt at writing my ‘diary’ in verses from October 1972 to December 1973. My encounter in 1971-72 with the poetry of an American poet-professor, Lyle Glazier, had a shaping influence on my poetic sensibility. There was a lot to say after leaving the monotonous life at Varanasi and moving to Pulgaon (Wardha, Maharashtra), returning again and visiting several places in search of a job(1972-73), moving to Lucknow (1973), New Delhi (1973-74), and finally to Bhutan, where from March 1974 to November 1975, I lived in the lap of Nature and composed almost a poem a day. I experienced not only peace in the beautiful Himalayan kingdom but also found the required dimension to my poetry and personality. I had plenty of free time and I could dream, feel and think.

But soon loneliness began to haunt me and I started hunting for a change. I came to Dhanbad in February 1976 and lost my peace in the whirlwind to teacher activism, academic research, and uncertainties of all sorts. My psyche was disturbed, but it was in the mounting tensions that I could perform my best: I wrote my PhD thesis, and later published it as *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic* (1984). Intermittently poetry and sex came as a relief.

For many years, my dreamt dreams, personal experiences with people, reading good writing, or seeing good painting (or work of art), have inspired my creativity. Some part is also played by the completely demotivating environment of campus life in Dhanbad. Now any small, negligible aspect of one’s behavior or attitude, any insignificant event, anything, including sexual experience, can inspire me if it expresses ‘momentness of a moment’ or become an imagery. Even something read or heard in the past may get connected with something Now and incite me into a poem.

I am also inspired by human body which is the best picture of the human soul: I glorify it. We are flesh in sensuality and there is divinity in it. It is ever refreshing to me to express love and sex, the internalized substitute, or antidote to the fast dehumanizing existence without and ever in conflict with my search for life. It helps me enlarge my self to the universal sameness of human feeling.

**3. When did you publish your first book and how did the success follow later?**

As I said, *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic*, an exploration of Sri Aurobindo's massive epic in English, *Savitri* (1950) for PhD, was my first book published by Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly (U.P.), India in 1984. Krishna Srinivas (1913-2007), editor and publisher of the *Poet*, an international monthly and recipient of Padmabhushan award (2004), was so impressed by it that he requested me to do a critical essay on his poetry and sent me all his books. I ended up doing a monograph *Krishna Srinivas: The Poet of Inner Aspiration*, which he published from his Poets Press India, Madras in 1984. He also gave me the much needed break by publishing free of cost my first collection of poems, *My Silence*, in 1985. I also edited with an introduction a collection of articles on his poetry, *Sound and Silence*, published in 1986. There has been no looking back since then. I have published almost a book a year. These include 16 poetry collections, 13 English language related books, and 11 Indian English literature related books. In addition, I have published over 160 academic articles and over 170 book reviews. My poems and articles have also been anthologized in over 180 publications. (For details, pl. visit <http://prof rk singh list of publications.blogspot.in> )

**4. Poems Have Been Translated Into National And International Languages?**

Yes, some of my poems have been translated into Indian languages such as Hindi, Tamil, Bangla, Kannada and Punjabi, and foreign languages such as French, Spanish, Romanian, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, Bulgarian, Italian, German, Portuguese, Greek, Farsi, Arabic, Albanian, Crimean Tatar, and Esperanto.

**5. A reviewer, critic and contemporary poet who writes in Indian English, university professor with active interest in poetry and English language interview?**

Perhaps, you mean to say English language teaching? Yes, professionally I have been concerned with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially for science and technology, for about three decades. Working at Indian School of Mines, a technical university, I initiated ‘need-based’ English language teaching to the undergraduate and post graduate students of earth and mineral sciences and engineering, even as personally I have been practicing poetry, besides reviewing and/or critiquing new voices, ignored by the media and academia alike.

**6. Haiku followers, one important reason may lie in the power of kigo?**

That’s why Gabi Greve devoted several years preparing a list of ‘kigo’ words from different countries, cultures and societies, including India.

Haiku is a difficult genre to practice. To me, it’s a spiritual exercise, helping one to pursue what is true, fulfilling and joyous. It took me several years to compose publishable haiku with native experiences. Though brevity has been a prominent feature of my regular poems from *My Silence* onwards, and I attempted many poems with ‘haiku’ stanzas, but genuine haiku with Indian kigo started happening much later.

**7. With the reader who is also a poet, especially a haiku poet, such effects can generate and offer fresh experiences of the?**

Sameness in differences? The snapshots of our living experiences provide a sort of balance by other aspects – nature, time, seasons, trees, birds, flowers, festivals, urban chaos, new technological developments, in short, all that we see, feel or know. We look outside to communicate the inside, the perception response, the vision, you know. It's a sort of continual dialogue within vis-à-vis the life and world we experience without; it's an inner communication, a process of self-discovery, a spiritual experience, as I said. After this, there is only silence, the briefest haiku.

“in silence/one with the divine will/growing within”

“on the river’s bank/his soul is lighted for peace--/lantern in the sky”

“squatting/in the middle of the field/a woman with child”

“awake/alone on the house top/a sparrow”

“hitching up the skirt/she fills her pockets with unripe mangoes”

“pigeons fly/for shelter through smoke--/blazing windows”

“wiping his face/under the umbrella/an old man with books”

**8. What can you tell us about your work, prizes, journeys and friendships?**

With the arrival of Internet, it became easier to reach out to audiences in different countries. Otherwise it was only through the snail mail I could contact editors and haiku practitioners. The editors and publishers of *Azami* (Osaka), *SGL* (USA), *The Tanka Journal* (Japan), *Ko* (Japan), *Prophetic Voices* (USA), *Micropress Yates* (Australia), *Micropress NZ* (New Zealand), *Noreal* (France), *Kanora* (Columbia), *Manxa* (Spain), *Vrabac/Sparrow*

(Croatia), *HQ Poetry Magazine* (UK), *La Pierna Tierna* (USA), *Forum* (New Zealand), *Poet* (Madras/Chennai), *Creative Forum* (New Delhi), *Poetcrit* (Himachal Pradesh), *Asahi Shimbun* (Japan), *Paper Wasp* (Australia), *Simply Words* (USA), *Haiku Novine* (Yugoslavia/Croatia), *At Last* (Scotland), *Mirrors* (Canada), *The Haiku Quarterly* (UK), *Lynx* (USA) and scores of other poetry journals supported my creative efforts in the beginning. Friends such as H.F. Noyes (Greece), Mohammed H. Siddiqui (USA), Patricia Prime (New Zealand), Angelee Deodhar (Chandigarh), Dejan Bogojevic, Marijan Cekolj, Zoran Doderovic, Ruth Wildes Schuler (USA) and others actively helped me understand the warp and woof of haiku and helped me reach out. My academic commitments won't let me travel to attend haiku poets meet in India or outside, but friends and well-wishers have been helpful.

Though my collections, *My Silence* (1985), *Memories Unmemoried* (1988), *Music Must Sound* (1990), *Flight of Phoenix* (1990), and *Above the Earth's Green* (1997) contain many 'micropoems', including haiku and tanka , *Every Stone Drop Pebble* (New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1999, jointly with Catherine Mair and Patricia Prime) is my first haiku collection. *Pacem in Terris* (Trento: Edizioni Universum, 2003, a trilogy collection of poems in English and Italian) includes my second haiku collection, *Peddling Dream*, translated into Italian by Giovanni Campisi. *The River Returns* (Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2006) is my next collection including both haiku and tanka. I collected all the previously published books and new poems, along with haiku, tanka and sequences in *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems* (2010). The volumes that followed it include New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku (2012), *I am No Jesus and Other Selected Poems, Tanka and Haiku*, with translation into Crimean Tatar by Taner Murat (2014) published by Editura StudIS (Romania), and most recently *You Can't Scent Me and Other Selected Poems* (New Delhi: AuthorsPress, 2016), which includes most of my new poems and some haiku and tanka sequences.

I must admit haiku and tanka practice helped me register my international presence just as awards and honors such as Ritsumeikan University Peace Museum Award, Kyoto 1999, Certificate of Honor and Nyuusen Prize in Kumamoto International Kusamamoto Haiku Competition, Japan, 2000 and 2008, Special Award Diogen, 2013, Nazar Look Prize for Poetry, Romania, 2013, Nomination for Pushcart Prize 2013, 2014, Naji Naaman's Literary Prize, Lebanon, 2015, Honorable Mention in 68<sup>th</sup> Basho Festival, 2014 and Grand Prize in 69<sup>th</sup> Basho Festival, 2015 have been gratifying.

#### **9. Do you think you have outwitted the expectations?**

Hopefully, I have communicated well enough to last for a longer time, at least in India, as an Indian English poet. I do expect an academic exploration of my poetry for higher degrees (like MA/MPhil/PhD) with learned articles in journals at home and abroad. I'm afraid the media and academia in the country have ignored me despite my four decades of writing and publishing.

#### **10. How do you manage all that with so much work that you do? Do you have time for yourself?**

Simply, I didn't waste my time, doing nothing. I used every minute of my free time. My wife managed the home front, leaving me free to do the academic and other work in the institution. My children didn't bother me for tuition etc. Poetry happened anywhere anytime. Publishers too showed interest in my writing for it's novelty. Things were smooth that way.

Now that I am retired, I would like to do certain things I could not, for want of professional commitments, like research and teaching. Now I would like to live for myself for a change. Let's see how things shape up.

**11. Is there anything that you could pinpoint and tell us about yourself between the dream and reality?**

First, I never wanted to be a teacher and I became one. Second, I didn't want to work or stay in Dhanbad and I had not only my career in Dhanbad for over four decades but I also had to settle down here post-retirement. And, finally, the way my father and sisters treated me, my wife and children, we could not forget, though we have forgiven them all. We all seek familial affection among strangers!

**12. What are your plans for the future creative work?**

To publish a volume of letters received as editor, reviewer, poet, writer, or academic from persons I never met but who reflected on my work, relationship, decisions etc whereby some aspects of my mind, creativity or personality can be gleaned. It is intended as a memoir and tentatively, I've called it 'Through Their Eyes: A Memoir'.

**13. Have you achieved everything you have ever wanted to and if you could live your life again would you be an artist again?**

I have been a restless soul, very impatient, and hardly contented. Though I notice a decline in my mental faculty—my forgetting is faster than remembering, as I said once earlier, I think poetry, especially haiku and tanka, will continue to happen, and one day I will be recognized for what I have done as a poet. I already achieved the highest for my work as a practitioner of ELT/EST. No doubt, I would love to be born again as an artist.

**14. Is there anything you would like to say that you think is important and that I haven't asked you ?**

Can't say at the moment. I have already spoken too much in response to what you asked.

**15. It was a great pleasure talking to you and you are always welcome to our house "Diogen pro cultura" magazine.**

Many thanks for your probing questions. It's been a great pleasure talking to you. I value your support.

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**4.**

**Read and help each other**

**MARSocial Interviews: Helen Ingram**

**HI: What inspired you to become a writer?**

**RKS:** I am not a full-time writer, nor do I earn my living by writing. I have now been a full-time professor for more than twenty five years and have been writing in response to my academic and creative urges from time to time. In fact, teaching and writing have been going on for nearly four decades. While academic writing has been a sort of professional compulsion—there is nothing inspiring about it--, creative writing , especially poetry, keeps happening from personal experiences with people I observe or interact.

Right from the beginning I have been aware of the emptiness within and my spiritual inclinations. There has been an attempt to understand myself and the world around me vis-à-vis the rising social injustice and disintegration, human suffering, degradation of relationship, sexual hypocrisy, political corruption, fundamentalism, intolerance, hollowness of academics, their values and prejudices, my loneliness, frustration, depression, and boring existence, etc.

A huge part has also been played by the completely demotivating environment of the campus life in Dhanbad. Now any small negligible aspect of one's behavior or attitude, any insignificant event, any thing can inspire me to compose a poem, if it

can become an imagery. Even something read or heard in the past may get connected with something NOW and incite me into a poem.

I am also inspired by human body which is the best picture of human soul: I glorify it. We are flesh in sensuality and there is divinity in it. It is ever refreshing to me to express love and sex, the internalized substitute, or antidote to the fast dehumanizing existence without and ever in conflict with my search for life. It helps me enlarge my self to the universal sameness of human feelings.

**HI: What genre of writing are your books and why?**

**RKS:** A large part of my academic writing – research articles, book reviews, and boos—relates to English Language Teaching, especially for science and technology (EST) and Indian English Writing, especially poetry.

I have been teaching English language skills, particularly writing, to students of earth and mineral sciences and technology at tertiary level for about four decades now. My focus has been on need-based, skills oriented applied language teaching with ‘English for Specific Purposes’ (ESP) approach. As far as Indian English writing is concerned, I have contributed to the study of several less known/upcoming/new poets and writers who have been neglected by both the media and academia . Apart from regular poems in free verse form, I have also been writing haiku and tanka in English. The choice of the Japanese form matches with my preference for brevity, lyricism, visual quality, spirituality, and lack of didacticism in poetry.

**HI:** What are the titles of your books and please provide a brief description of each one?

**RKS:** I have published forty books: Ten books relate to English language teaching practices, including *Using English in Science and Technology*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1988, 2000, and 2010 editions, pages 336 (a text-cum-practice book); *General English Practice*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1995, pages 192. (A textbook on Comprehension, Precis, Summary, Letter, Sentence, and paragraph writing); *Communication in English: Grammar and Composition*, Bareilly : Prakash Book Depot, 2003, pages 148. ( A textbook on grammar and composition ); *Teaching English for Specific Purposes : An Evolving Experience*, Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2005, pages 289 (a collection of my earlier published research articles and review essays); *English as a Second Language: Experience into Essays*, Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2007, pages 308 (An edited collection of research articles); and *English Language Teaching: Some Aspects Recollected*, Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2008, pages 238 (An edited collection of research articles);

Eleven books relate to criticism/literary appreciation, including *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1984, pages 164 (A critical study of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*); *Indian English Writing: 1981-1985: Experiments with Expression*, New Delhi: Bahri Publications Pvt Ltd., 1987, rept. 1991, pages 168 (A collection of critical articles, edited with an introduction); *Recent Indian English Poets: Expressions and Beliefs*, New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1992, pages 192 (A collection of critical articles, edited with Introduction); . *Anger in Action: Explorations of Anger in In Writing in English*, New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1997, pages 238 (A collection of critical articles – edited with an Introduction); *Psychic Knot : Search for Tolerance in Indian English Fiction*, New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 1998, pages 211 ( A collection of critical articles – edited with an Introduction ); *New Zealand Literature : Some Recent Trends*, New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 1998, pages 138 ( A collection of critical articles–edited with an Introduction); *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri : Essays on Love, Life and Death*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2005, pages 176 (a collection of my earlier published critical articles); *Voices of the Present: Critical Essays on Some Indian English Poets*. Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2006, pages 267 (A collection of earlier published critical articles); and *Indian Poetry in English: In Search of Identity*. New Delhi: Authors Press, 2012, pages 303 ( a volume of critical essays, jointly edited with an Introduction with Rajni Singh); and

Seventeen books are poetry collections including *My Silence*, Madras: Poets Press India, 1985, pages 44 (my first collection of poems); *My Silence and Other*

*Selected Poems: 1974-1994*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1996, pages 185 (A collection of poems, including earlier out-of-print volumes); *Above the Earth's Green*, Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1997, pages 126 (A collection of poems); *Every Stone Drop Pebble*, New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 1999, pages 70 ( A collection of Haiku, jointly with Catherine Mair and Patricia Prime); *Cover to Cover: A collection of Poems* (R K Singh : *The Face in All Seasons* , pp 43),New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 2002. ( A Collection of Poems jointly with Ujjal Singh Bahri); *Pacem in Terris*, Trento, Italy: Edizioni Universum, 2003 (A trilogy collection of poems in English and Italian, jointly with Myriam Pierri and Giovanni Campisi, including my haiku collection,*Peddling Dream*, pages 63-88); *The River Returns*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2006, pages 86 (A collection of tanka and haiku); *Sexless Solitude and Other Poems*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2009, pages 86 ( a collection of poems); *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems*, Jaipur: Yking Books. 2010, Pages 338. (The volume includes all previously published collections of poems with some new poems, haiku, and tanka); *New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku*, New Delhi: Authors Press, 2012, pages 96 (a collection of poems); and *I Am No Jesus and Other Selected Poems, Tanka and Haiku*. Iasa: Editura StudIS, 2014, pages 54, (my latest collection of poems with translation into Crimean Tatar by Taner Murat and Illustrations by Alsou Shikhova Ildarovna).

## **HI: Where are your books available?**

**RKS:** Most of my books are available directly from the publishers. Their names, addresses, and websites/email are as under:

1. Prakash Book Depot, Bara Bazar, Bareilly 243003, India. Web: [prakashbookdepot.blogspot.in](http://prakashbookdepot.blogspot.in) ; email: [prakashbookdepot@gmail.com](mailto:prakashbookdepot@gmail.com)
2. Authors Press, E-35/103, Jawahar Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi 110092, India. Web: [www.authorspressbooks.com](http://www.authorspressbooks.com) ; email: [authorspsress@rediffmail.com](mailto:authorspsress@rediffmail.com)
3. Bahri Publications, 1749A/5, First Floor, Gobindpuri Extension, Kalkaji, New Delhi 110019, INDIA. Web: [www.bahripublications.in](http://www.bahripublications.in) ; email: [bahripublications@yahoo.com](mailto:bahripublications@yahoo.com)

4. Book Enclave, F-11, S.S. Tower, Dhamani Street, Chaura Rasta, Jaipur 302003, India. Web: [www.bookenclave.com](http://www.bookenclave.com) ; email: [aadipublications@gmail.com](mailto:aadipublications@gmail.com)
5. Yking Books, G-13, S.S.Tower, Dhamnai Street, Chaura Rasta, Jaipur 302003. Web: [www.ykingbooks.com](http://www.ykingbooks.com) , email: [ykingbooks@gmail.com](mailto:ykingbooks@gmail.com)
6. [www.nazar-look.com](http://www.nazar-look.com) ; email: [nazar.look@mail.com](mailto:nazar.look@mail.com)

Some of my books are also available from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [createspace.com](http://createspace.com)

Almost all of my poems, both new and old, or published individually and in book form, are also available on the following sites:

<http://rksingh.blogspot.in>

<http://collectedpoemsofrksingh.blogspot.in>

<http://selectedpoemsofrksingh.blogspot.in>

<http://proferskingh.blogspot.in>

<http://indiasaijikiworlkhaiku.blogspot.in/2006/07/r-k-singh.html>

[http://www.indianfaculty.com/Faculty\\_Articles/FA20/fa20.html](http://www.indianfaculty.com/Faculty_Articles/FA20/fa20.html)

[http://pennyspoetry.wikia.com/wiki/R.K.\\_Singh](http://pennyspoetry.wikia.com/wiki/R.K._Singh)

<http://www.issuu.com/ramkrishnasingh>

<http://www.penpoetry.com/allpoetry/ram-krishna-singh.html>

**HI: What are you currently working on?**

**RKS:** Nothing very specific, except reading some new collections received from poet friends, and guiding a couple of MPhil/PhD dissertations.

In fact I badly need a change from the present deadly monotony of existence in the maze of routine: it has been a long journey from loneliness to frustration to depression, on the one hand, and search for purpose and meaning in life, on the other. So, I am now eagerly looking forward to a relaxed, retired life, with freedom to do or pursue what I couldn't, and to enjoy and discover myself. I have been toying with the idea of writing my autobiography, but let's see...

**HI: What writers inspire you?**

**RKS:** Since I have been mostly reading new and less known poets writing in English, I can't mention any big creative influences as such. Yet, I must acknowledge the impact of my American poet-professor friend, late Lyle Glazier (of Bennington, Vermont) whom I met in 1971-72 as a student and with whom I stayed in touch for about 25 years till his death. He was my best poet-critic friend. In fact I not only learnt from him how to edit a poem but, reading his poetry, I was also able to discover my own poetic sensibility. Then, the Psalms of the Bible have been my another inspiration and influence.

**HI: What is the biggest thing you have learnt while self-publishing?**

**RKS:** While one hardly finds a publisher for poetry, most of the established or well-known poets care tuppenny for the new or aspiring poets: they will neither read them nor mention them to people who matter. And, it hurts most when the academia dump them without even reading their work that always reaches them gratis; they don't even acknowledge receiving a new poet's book, published with so much expectation and enthusiasm.

Even if the internet has made one easily accessible, it is disappointing to find most poets/writers interested only in their own works rather than in others' works. There may be some 'viewing' here and there but there is hardly any serious 'reading' which makes self-publishing a self-defeating exercise.

Yet, this (self-publishing) is the only alternative available to most of us aspiring to become published authors.

**HI: What advice would you give to other writers.**

**RKS:** Read and help each other, recognizing the merits, rather than rejecting and dumping one without caring to read him/her even once. The more you shed your biases, the more will be your pleasure.

**HI: Where can people follow you on the internet?**

**RKS:** On my blogs, twitter, facebook, LinkedIN, and various other sites. Some of these I have already mentioned. Some others could be:

<https://twitter.com/profrksingh> ; <https://www.facebook.com/rksingh311250> ;  
[www.rksingh.wordpress.com](http://www.rksingh.wordpress.com) ; <http://www.lit.org/author/R.K.Singh> ;  
<http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Ram-Krishna-Singh> ;  
[www.poemhunter.com/poet/r-k-singh](http://www.poemhunter.com/poet/r-k-singh) ; [www.poemsabout.com/poet/r-k-singh](http://www.poemsabout.com/poet/r-k-singh) ;  
<http://micropoetry.com/author/profrksingh> ; [www.facebook.com/profrksingh](http://www.facebook.com/profrksingh) ;  
[www.marsocial.com/rksingh](http://www.marsocial.com/rksingh) ; <http://www.tumblr.com/blog/rksingh1950> ;  
<http://www.syndicjournal.us/> ; [in.linkedin.com/pub/ram-krishna-singh/17/195/890/](http://in.linkedin.com/pub/ram-krishna-singh/17/195/890/)

[First published online

<https://marsocialauthorbusinessenhancementlovehurtloss.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/interview-with-ram-krishna-singh-india/> ; *Voice of Kolkata*, Vol. 15/2 & 16/1 Combined, January 2015]

**Helen Ingram**, raised in Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, UK is a Self Published author, poet, artist, interviewer, and owner of New Art United, a platform for emerging artists. *Love, Hurt and Loss A Collection Of Poetry* (2013) is her poetry collection while *Corkscrew Catastrophe* is her novel. She lives in Stoke-on-Trent, UK.

**5.**

## **My forgetting is faster than remembering**

**POET PROFESSOR R.K.SINGH TALKS TO TANER MURAT**

**TM:** Professor Singh, at what age did you discover the poet in you?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** Perhaps, at about 12 or 13, when I composed my first poem in Hindi, which appeared in the children's magazine supplement of a Hindi daily *Aj* (Varanasi).

**TM:** Do you have other writers or artists in your family?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** Yes, my youngest brother and two of my sisters have also been dabbling in poetry and short story in Hindi, but I doubt they are active now. One of my uncles made a living by drawing, painting, making cinema slides, advertisements etc. It seems to me that our family has been blessed with good imaginative faculty.

**TM:** Has literature the ability to change the way people live their lives?

**Ram Krishna Singh :** Even if the appeal of literature depends on the sensitivity of readers, poets and writers can be influential by, what someone calls, "the force of imaginative insight." They can be helpful in bringing about inner harmony and balance in an individual, negotiating life in a highly tense or disturbed body politic, rival impulses and ideals, or conflicts and hostilities. Though I have no taste for didacticism in poetry, nor do I seek to preach or debate issues, I do believe people

of one culture can understand the values of others through diverse literary exposure/interaction. This can help open their minds to grasp how one might be a full human being, with whom one could communicate, and at the same time live in the light of values widely different from ones own. So literature as negotiation of differences can make changes in the way people live their lives.

**TM:** Help me understand your work. How would you describe it?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** As I said, I don't stand for didacticism or preaching in poetry. Rather, I write a poem to seek a release from myself as much as from others; to feel free by unburdening myself, and experiencing an inner balance, feeling, probing, sensing, recalling, or whatever. If it turns out to be a good poem, it has beauty and meaning created out of a pressing sense of inner emptiness. It stimulates some sensuous, spiritual, or exalted pleasure, or generates some physical, emotional, or psychosexual sensation.

I love brevity, rhythm, and 'coloring of human passion,' personal, lyrical, honest, and free expression, with seriousness in reflection and interpretation. Like everyone, I too pass through time, through unfulfilled desires, dreams and passions, through meaninglessness and purposelessness of an existence which questioningly stares into my eyes all the time just as I try to preserve all those small moments that offer pleasing sensations and rest to my otherwise disturbed nerves and inner being. I also experience poetry in the brief interfusion with sex which has a rare subtlety of awareness. I feel myself in words that acquire their own existence in the process of making in a form I may have no control over: I read a new meaning in and through my verses that are often an extension of myself.

**TM:** Who are your biggest creative influences?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** Since I have been mostly reading new and less known poets writing in English, I can't mention any big creative influences as such. Yet, I must acknowledge the impact of my American poet-professor friend, late Lyle Glazier (of Vermont), whom I met in 1971-72 as a student and with whom I stayed in

touch for about 25 years till his death. He was my best poet-critic friend. In fact I learnt from him how to edit a poem. He helped me edit my first collection, *My Silence* (1985). Reading his poetry, I discovered my own poetic sensibility. Then, the Psalms of the Bible have been my another influence, perhaps.

**TM:** Do you have preferred themes? Were you always wondering about the issues you now wonder about?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** I don't know. My fundamentals have remained unchanged. I have touched many themes: individual passion, mythical awareness, human relationship, social consciousness, and become my own veil and revelation. The themes of spiritual search, an attempt to understand myself and the world around me, social injustice and disintegration, human suffering, degradation of relationship, political corruption, fundamentalism, hollowness of urban life and its false values, prejudices and superstitions, loneliness, sex, love, irony, intolerance, hypocrisy etc seem to be prominent. In my haiku there is a deeper perception of the quotidian as well as things in their complex simplicity. Then, there is the theme of social reality, which is not devoid of the private and sexual. The use of erotic metaphors reveals the hidden truths about the individual or his /her social consciousness. In fact, in the oriental poetry and art, sexual experiences illumine inner realities and are not different from other human experiences such as eating or sleeping. There is some sense in love of the self through exploration of the body, or naked physicality, leading to love of the divine, or man and woman as one. Erotic theme or imagery in my poetry has a transpersonal dimension.

Perhaps, the problem is not sex/sexuality but social attitude, false morality, hypocrisy, the socio-sexual standards that determine 'civilized' norms, that discriminate, enchain, and debase honest aspirations.

**TM:** Is your work process fast or slow?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** It's fast, I think. I have written most of my poems in the spirit of 'here and now'. Shorter poems – lyrics, haiku and tanka – simply happen anywhere, anytime. It takes hardly 10 minutes to complete it. A long poem

(beyond 15 lines or so) may take half-an-hour and some times, intermittently, a day or two! As far as prose writing is concerned, it takes some planning, reasoning, and note-making—understanding what I need to write—and then write, and edit, revise and re-write, till I am convinced that it meets the purpose of writing.

**TM:** How many evaluations does your work go through before you are satisfied with it?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** Since a poem literally happens—I may get inspired by anything, anybody, any event, any person—I rarely revise or evaluate it. A weak poem makes me aware of its deficiency right at the start and I try to improve it within the first half-an-hour, or forget about it. May revise/rewrite it after a day or two. In fact, so much seems to be happening subconsciously or unconsciously that it is difficult to say what will inspire or get expressed when, where, or how. But when an empathetic poet-reader makes some suggestion for improvement, I am always open to change.

**TM:** Rhymed poems or free verse?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** I don't think I ever tried to write rhymed verse in English. I have written only free verse.

**TM:** Where do you write?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** The source of creative inspiration has always been mysterious. When and where it happens, nobody can say. I have composed poems while walking, eating, taking bath, defecating, reading, praying, interacting, travelling, or just relaxing.

**TM:** Is there a time of day or night when you have energy that is more creative?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** No. There has never been a fixed time for my creative energy to be active. It may be spurred anytime, by my personal experiences with people in waking life, my dreamt dreams, seeing good paintings, or reading good writing. For academic or critical writing, however, morning hours seem more effective.

**TM:** What gives you most enjoyment from your poetry? Do you admire your own poems?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** It pleases me most when a poem is published, or appreciated by a poet/critic. And, if someone's comment reveals certain aspects of a poem I am not aware of, I am naturally inclined to appreciate it more.

**TM:** When you write a poem, do you start with the title first? Or do you write the poem first and think of the title after?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** The truth is, I am very poor at titling my poems. I am yet to compose a poem with title integral to it. In fact, I believe in giving no titles to my poems. Titles tell too much, as Lyle Glazier once observed. These interfere with readers' freedom of imagination. But if I suspend some poems by titles, it is only to facilitate their individual identification or separation from the rest of the poems. That's all.

**TM:** Why are modern poets neglecting the rules of poetry?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** It's perhaps because they're not aware of the rules, or because they vie with each other to subvert and create something different! This is also reflective of the decline in reading, learning, and industry, and shabbiness in human behavior and intellectual habits.

**TM:** How do you balance reading and writing?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** If one has no time to read, one can't write. As simple as that. Having said that, I must admit that I read everything—good, bad, trash, technical, journalistic, aesthetic, serious, literary, non-literary, popular--and try to absorb it. Maybe, sometimes use it, too, if it's good. Otherwise, forget it. My forgetting is faster than my remembering. As for its process, let me also say that I have always tried to keep the academic writer separate from the poet in me, though when I review, or do a critical article, the academic in me is also active.

I have also tried to maintain a balance between my academic activities that give me my bread and professional status, and poetic creativity that gives me an identity in Indian Writing in English but not money. Now that I have considerably reduced my academic reading (or research), I hope I will concentrate more on poetry practices internationally. I also need to read more to enjoy than to write as a reviewer, critic, or academician.

**TM:** Do you exchange work with your students?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** If you mean exchange of my poems with students, it's NO. I mostly teach 'English for Science and Technology' (EST) skills to undergraduate and postgraduate students who have little time to read literature. The M.Phil (English) students do read my poems as part of their Indian English writing course. A couple of them have also explored my poetry for MPhil and PhD dissertations. Since my poetry is available on the internet (as also in the library), interested students read it on their own, and sometimes interact with me also. Some of them meet me to show their poems.

**TM:** Will you only preface a good book?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** Yes. You're right. The book must motivate me to say something fresh, or worth saying. A good book, however, stands on its own and needs no one for its introduction. So, I must match its level to be able to preface it!

**TM:** When you are not writing, where would we most likely find you?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** At home, watching TV, or reading newspapers, or some literary journal or magazine. There is nowhere else to go! Dhanbad is no good for a poet writing in English. Nor is there a better place, away from the campus, to go to.

**TM:** What is the best place to have lunch with a writer in Dhanbad?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** Dhanbad is essentially a coal city with no culture of its own. Since it is now one of the fastest growing cities of India, a few good hotels have come up but I doubt these provide the desired ambience for a writer to have lunch or dinner. Yet, I discovered a Resort early this year. One can leisurely drink, eat, and chat there.

**TM:** Where can we find you on the web?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** One can google my name to find me on the web, but one can view some of my work on the following sites:

<http://rksingh.blogspot.in>

<http://prof rk singh.blogspot.in>

<http://rksinghpoet.blogspot.in>

<http://www.lit.org/author/R.K.Singh>

[http://www.indianfaculty.com/Faculty\\_Articles/FA20/fa20.html](http://www.indianfaculty.com/Faculty_Articles/FA20/fa20.html)

[http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Ram\\_Krishna\\_Singh](http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Ram_Krishna_Singh)

<http://collectedpoemsofrksingh.blogspot.in/2010/11/sense-and-silence-collected-poems-of.html>

<http://indiasaijikiworldhaiku.blogspot.in/2006/07/r-k-singh.html>

<http://www.penpoetry.com/allpoetry/ram-krishna-singh.html>

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/ram-krishna-singh/17/195/890>

[http://pennyspoetry.wikia.com/wiki/R.K.\\_Singh](http://pennyspoetry.wikia.com/wiki/R.K._Singh)

**TM:** What is ahead for Professor Ram Krishna Singh?

**Ram Krishna Singh:** I badly need a change from the present deadly monotony of existence in the maze of routine: it has been a long journey from loneliness to frustration to depression, on the one hand, and search for purpose and meaning of life, on the other. Now, I eagerly look forward to a relaxed, retired life, with freedom to do or pursue whatever interests me—to visit places I couldn't, to read books I couldn't, and to enjoy and discover myself, reading, writing, travelling, or whatever.

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[https://issuu.com/kirim-tatar-kitaplari/docs/nazar\\_2013\\_09\\_online](https://issuu.com/kirim-tatar-kitaplari/docs/nazar_2013_09_online) ]

**Taner Murat** is Cultural Expert at Asociatia Multiculturala Anticus , Constanta, Tatar language and Comparative literature expert, translator, poet, editor of the magazine *Nazar Look*, and author/editor of several books including *The Sounds of Tatar Spoken in Romania: The Golden Khwarezmian Language of the Nine Noble Nations*, *Luceafărul – Solpan*, *Mihai Eminescu*, *Dicționar Tătar Crimean-Român/Kırım Tatarça Kazakça Sözlük*, *Dicționar Român-Tătar Crimean/Kazakça-Kırım Tatarça Sözlük*, *Metric Conversions Metreli Qaytarmalar: Poetry of Our Time*, *Opening the Doors of Science, Crossing the Path of Tellers: Short Stories of Our Time*, and scores of articles. He lives in Constanta, Romania.

## 6.

### **One needs to be honest to oneself**

#### **In conversation with Varsha Singh**

Brought up and educated in Varanasi, India, Dr. R.K. Singh is a university professor teaching English language skills to students of earth and mineral sciences. He has authored over 160 research articles and 170 book reviews in journals in all over the world. He has been writing poems in English for over three decades now and is widely anthologized and published in various journals and e-zines. Team Reviews is glad to feature an enriched conversation with Dr. Singh.

**VS: Sir, what started you writing poetry?**

**RKS:** Expression of creativity is own cause. It has been a natural activity happening by itself since my teenage. I offer no justification for writing poetry.

**VS: What sort of thing did you write about when you began?**

**RKS:** I initially wrote in Hindi with my teenage imagination, both in metrical and free verse form. It was largely romantic stuff but at times, social and political too. I can safely call it ‘practice exercises’ which continued in English, too, till I discovered my own natural voice and rhythm in my early twenties. By then, I had the maturity to reflect on personal life and experiences that include various familial, social, political, cultural, psychosexual, erotic, philosophical, spiritual, and even literary and academic issues, just as there were aspects of love, loneliness, failure, frustration, and memories.

**VS: Now, jumping the years, can you say, are there any themes which particularly attract you as a poet, things that you feel you would like to write about?**

**RKS:** Such a question is relevant for poets who are good at writing about a particular subject (on demand). Since I deliberately or consciously do not write on

a particular theme, I can't say what specific theme I should write in future. I have been writing what I intimately know or understand, or what naturally occurs to my mind, as part of my living experiences.

**VS:** *Has there ever been a point when you thought the reader is not going to understand this? Have you ever imagined yourself in the readers' shoes while writing?*

**RKS:** Sometimes when I re-read my poems and find that I am not able to understand it myself as a reader, I try to rewrite it, or discard it. I do ensure that I don't put out a poem which is not sensible to me. Sometimes certain images and metaphors may be challenging, but I do enjoy writing poems that may be "ambiguous" and/or allow more meanings than one. For example, since I hardly use titles or punctuation marks, the lines can be read differently to derive different meanings. Then, there is the use of enjambment (one line passing to the next with full period or question mark etc at the end) just as there are instances where first word of the next line plays a double role both at grammatical and semantic levels. The readers do need to be sensitive about these features of my poetry that make it simple and complex at the same time. This has been my normal style, posing difficulty to readers.... I am not writing prose as poetry!

**VS:** *Could you speak about the use of clichés in your poetry?*

**RKS:** If you point to the use of sex as clichés, then I would like you to read Dr G.D. Barche's article 'Phoenix' and 'Icarus' Reworked in the Erotic Poetry of R.K.Singh (*Creative Forum*, Jan-Dec 1991) and R.S. Tiwary's article 'Secret of the First Menstrual Flow: R.K.Singh's Commitment to Fleshly Reality' (*Language Forum*, Jan-Dec 1997). Both these articles are also available in *New Indian English Poetry: An Alternative Voice* (ed. I.K.Sharma, 2004) Sex is a fact of daily life and it is through sex, one can understand the truths about the individual or his/her social consciousness.

**VS:** *You are well known for your haiku and Tanka. Can you tell me about when you first began to become interested in these forms of poetry and how it changed your perception of the writing small verses?*

**RKS:** I have been writing haiku and tanka for over three decades. In fact I used these forms as stanzas of many of my regular poems before these could happen with the sense of 'here and now' as individual poems. It appears now my lyrics are limited to tanka and regular poems reduced to haiku/senryu.

My first encounter with haiku was via Ezra Pound's translations nearly four decades ago. In the 1980s, I tried to explore haiku in the UK and USA and read many haijins. I gladly acknowledge help from Mohammed H. Siddiqui (Baltimore), who shared with me copies of several journals and quality haiku by many good practitioners in Japan, Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. I had great support from the editor and publisher of *Azami* (Japan). I could successfully write and publish many haiku and tanka all over the world.

**VS:** *How do you relate ideas to language, or aesthetics to language?*

**RKS:** For success in any creative genre, one needs to be not only sensitive about language but also love it. Aesthetic sense without language sense is incongruous. The process of relating it, i.e. aesthetics to language, is rather intuitive. One needs honesty to oneself.

**VS:** *Being a Professor, you have a vast experience of teaching. How would you say your experience in the classroom has influenced your poetry?*

**RKS:** Teaching, be it Scientific English, Grammar, Literature, or Criticism, has had no influence on my writing poetry. I have been a different person when I teach. I am not I when I write a poem.

**VS:** *When you finish a poem do you believe you have put order into that chaotic world of random language without a form?*

**RKS:** With practice and experience, an idea takes the form appropriate to it. If a poem begins well, it finds its end too. The initial chaos in the mind is resolved with the form it assumes and the end it gets.

**VS:** *The writing of poetry is something which has been a great satisfaction to you in your life, is it?*

**RKS:** Can't say. But I would like to be remembered as a poet.

**VS:** *What advice do you have for young poets/writers?*

**RKS:** Read what you enjoy reading. Read different poets/writers, and develop love for the language, a sense of rhythm, and sensibility.

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<http://rainingvoiceofdawn.blogspot.com/2015/01/interview-with-dr-rk-singh.html>

[https://www.academia.edu/32007604/Interview with Dr. R.K.Singh](https://www.academia.edu/32007604/Interview_with_Dr._R.K.Singh)

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7.

### **Sex is a positive presence in my poetry**

#### **R.K.Singh in conversation with Professor Ram Bhagwan Singh**

**RBS:** Sir, you are a leading English poet today having published a number of volumes of poetry. Please tell me, what was your first poem and when you wrote it?

**RKS:** It's so kind of you to have thought about me and talk to me about my poetry. I feel obliged to you.

I have been writing in English since my undergraduate days. If I correctly recall, the first poem in English was composed in 1967 and it appeared in the Deutsche Welle Club radio magazine in February 1968. I was 17 years old then. I would like to quote it for record:

#### LIFE

This life  
Like a butterfly  
From this flower to that  
From this garden to that  
And—  
In the dawn  
Someone's hand  
Catches its golden delighted feather  
Without carrying off the pleasant weather

Extinguishes--  
It's internal fire in a moment  
And creeps away  
Having the marks of its shades.

As for collections, *My Silence* is the first volume. It was published in 1985 by late Krishna Srinivas's Poets Press India, Madras. Till now 14 collections have appeared. I should, however, mention three, *The River Returns* (2006), *Sexless Solitude and Other Poems* (2009), and *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems* (2010), that drew international attention. My newest collection, *New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku* appeared a few months ago.

**RBS:** But, weren't you writing in Hindi also?

**RKS:** Yes, I remember having written my first poem in Hindi at the age of about 12, in June 1962. The poem appeared in a Hindi daily *AJ* of Varanasi, where I was born in December 1950, brought up and educated. My interest in literary activities and enthusiasm never waned since then.

**RBS:** Could I get a copy of the poem?

**RKS:** I'm afraid it's lost now. I had it in a file till about the end of 1990s. But now the file is missing. I can't locate it. In fact, the file contained 'cuttings' of many of my poems, journalistic writing, and even a few short stories....

**RBS:** Could you tell me more about your writing in Hindi?

**RKS:** From my High School days onwards, I dabbled in several poems and published in newspapers – dailies and weeklies—and magazines in Hindi. I remember some of these appeared in Sammarg, Gandiva, Samachar Times, Yugpath, Friends World, Raswanti, Jyotishmati, Tarun Vishwas, etc under the pen-name 'Tahira'. The missing file I mentioned contained over 150 journalistic articles besides eight to ten stories published upto 1971-72.

But, as I realized that my articles in Hindi dailies and weeklies were more read and

popular that the poems, from 1968-69 I started writing in English, too, and produced a large number of third-rate verses. Possibly, for this reason, a couple of my teachers in BHU, where I was a student of M.A. from 1970 to 1972, dissuaded me from writing verses in English. But I persisted in my efforts according to my own evolving sensibility. In retrospect, I am happy what I could not do in Hindi (which indeed is now very advanced and comparable with literature in any country) I have been successful in doing in Hindi.

**RBS:** That's quite interesting. You are essentially a bilingual poet.

**RKS:** In a way, yes. But I have not been regularly writing in Hindi, even as 2 or 3 poems in a year or two may naturally happen in Hindi. If you like, I may share my last poem composed in Hindi on 22 March 2011: सिलवटे /वैसी ही जैसे /महीनों पहले .

**RBS:** Sir, This leads me to another basic question: what inspires you to write poetry? Do you feel differently from others?

**RKS:** I don't know. One may be inspired by anything. Literally, any thing, any body, any event, any person. Sometimes, even while reading a book: you start reading and you feel that you can write something, and then you start writing. Or simply, you feel like writing, and write! The source of creative inspiration has always been mysterious. I have composed poems while walking, eating, taking bath, defecating, or even interacting with people. You may also say, my personal experiences with people in waking life, my dreamt dreams, seeing good paintings, and reading good writing have been inspiring my creativity, though some part is also played by the completely demotivating environment of campus life in Dhanbad.

As for the second part of your question, I think one can't be effective as a poet unless one is different from others. I would not have survived as a poet if I had not been feeling differently from others. I suspect I suffer with my sensitive and generous nature and have been aware of my vulnerability too. Sometimes I also feel that I have been trying to discover and celebrate who we really are vis-à-vis the chaos of life, or burst of adrenaline and confused thinking that results from it?

Or perhaps, I ask questions and seek answers from within, and remain true to myself.

**RBS:** Do you have any target audience?

**RKS:** Yes, whatever I write, I write to communicate with the educated, English-knowing audience at home and abroad. Using the internet, and particularly my blogs, I seek to reach out to a larger audience.

**RBS:** What is the concept of sex in your poetry? Are you obsessed with sex?

**RKS:** I am not obsessed with sex but it interests me most. Sex is a very vital presence in our life; it is a major constituent of our body and mind. We can't deny it. When God created us as male and female, he created sex and wanted us to live in harmony. God didn't deny coitus. We are flesh in sensuality and there is divinity in it. The fleshly unity is the reality, the passage to experience divinity, and its expression means to glorify Him in body. Biblically, the taste of the forbidden fruit in Eden is the awareness of physical attraction in man and woman just as the Tree of Knowledge is actually the knowledge of sex and love. Therefore, I consider sex as a positive presence in my poetry.

It is largely your insight into how you respond to it or how delightful to the senses or challenging to the mind you find it, or how you want to interpret my creative perception of meaning in the world. I touch many themes, individual passion, historic-mythical awareness, human relationship, social consciousness, and become my own veil and revelation.

In the subjective process of creation, it is normal for a poet to create out of himself: I am no exception. If whatever outside I see excites the inner vision, if I feel sex as truth and render the experience with beauty and power, then it is my poetic success.

In fact my social vision intersects the private and sexual. There is some sense in expression, in love of the self through exploration of the body, or naked physicality, leading to love of the divine, or man and woman as one.

As I said elsewhere, sex is a metaphor: the encounter of man and woman, man and man, woman and woman to express relationships, concerns, roles, to react against false ethical and cultural values, against stereotypes and prejudices, against hypocrisy. It is through the inner mindscape, the subjective experiences, the hidden sexual facts that one explores the profound truths. As a poet, if I use human passion, including the sexual, I try to transmute and transmit memories of experience, possibly more with a sense of irony than erotic sexuality.

So, in my concept of sex, the human body is a picture of the human soul, celebrated to understand the self and the world. If I seem to glorify nudity or use sex imagery, I do so to explore the consciousness, the inner landscape, lost in the muddle of external chaos.

**RBS:** Sir, aren't you endorsing 'sex to superconsciousness'?

**RKS:** No. I am not endorsing use of sex/sexuality as a means to attain to superconsciousness. I am rather saying that the readers, with a taste for imagery, symbolism, irony, and awareness of the present need to appreciate variation on sexuality in poetry since the 1960s-- nakedness, nudity, sensuality, obsession, imagined or real pleasure, woman's body as the form, object and route to inner reality to mitigate spiritual dissatisfaction. It is ultimately positive as it helps to relate our existence to poetry's existence as art, something that elevates as also protects us from violence without.

**RBS:** How do you regard women? Are they the 'better half'?

**RKS:** Equal to men, or, naturally more endowed than men. As our ancient literatures, the Vedas and the Upanishads would vouchsafe, sex is the source of happiness in equality, in oneness of man and woman, in love. Then, you know there is the concept of *ardhanareeshwar* also.

**RBS:** Matthew Arnold said: Poetry can replace religion. Does your poetry claim to teach religion?

**RKS:** I don't trust the institution of religion in the conventional sense, nor do I write poetry to preach religion. To me, values like hope, faith and love are the better substitute. In my poetry I am non-religious and non-moral. I stand for compassion and direct perception rather than religion.

**RBS:** What are the influences on your poetry? How does your family background contribute to your line of thinking?

**RKS:** I come from a humble family. My grandfather was a freedom fighter. My father is a self-made man with very liberal and progressive outlook. I have been brought up to think independently and take responsibility for all my action. The family has no prejudices of caste, creed, community, colour, religion, region, or even nationality. So I grew up to be my own self in my own way. This has persisted throughout and has distinct influence on my poetry too.

As for the literary influences, I must acknowledge the impact of my American poet-professor friend, late Lyle Glazier, whom I met in 1971-72 as a student and with whom I stayed in touch for about 25 years till his death. He was my best poet-critic friend. In fact I learnt from him how to edit a poem. He helped me edit *My Silence* (1985). Reading his poetry, I discovered my own poetic sensibility.

Then, the Psalms of the Bible has been another influence.

As I have been mostly reading new, less known/unknown poets from India and abroad, I can't mention any names from the canon. Researchers will have to explore and find out similarities and differences.

**RBS:** You have been published copiously abroad. Are you satisfied with the recognition you have received?

**RKS:** If I am considered an Indian English poet, it is important to have recognition in India which gives me my identity and existence. However, it's always gratifying to appear in a foreign magazine.

**RBS:** How do Haiku and Tanka interest you? How do they appeal to the general reader?

**RKS:** I have been practicing these difficult Japanese forms for over 25 years. Initially, I used these as stanzas of my regular poems, but it took me about 15 years to understand the essential spirit of haiku and tanka as independent poems.

Since most of my regular poems are brief, personal and lyrical, the haiku and taka forms happened naturally and I had good success with these in almost all the leading journals abroad. I think now I have absorbed their spirit.

**RBS:** It is felt that you have departed from the standard syllabic form of haiku. Why so?

**RKS:** Initially, I followed the standard 5-7-5 lines of haiku and 5-7-5-7-7 lines of tanka, but over the years I could use 3-5-3, 4-6-4 and free-form haiku if these instantly happened following the experience (or perception) of a moment. Many poets writing haiku in English are now using free form to remain true to the haiku spirit or haiku moment.

**RBS:** Have your works been translated into other languages? How is the response outside India?

**RKS:** It is encouraging to find some readers of my poetry abroad. My haiku collection *Peddling Dream* (in the trilogy *Pacem in Terris*) appeared in English and Italian in 2003. *Sexless Solitude and Other Poems* (2009) was translated into Greek and appeared on lulu.com (January 16, 2010). Bunches of my poems have been translated into Chinese, Albanian, Japanese, French, Spanish, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, Bulgarian, German, Portuguese, Esperanto, Hindi, Punjabi, Kannada, Tamil, Bangla, and other languages. From time to time I google and find it out. So, the response to my poetry has not been bad.

**RBS:** How do you account for the absence of punctuation marks in your poetry?

**RKS:** It helps me achieve a sort of ‘ambiguity’ in a poem and continuity from one poem to another. It also gives a sort of freedom to readers to choose their own pause(s) and recreate their meanings differently. I think it also provides a different style to my poems, like enjambment -- the running on of the thought from one line , couplet, or stanza to the next without a syntactical break.

**RBS:** You are not in the habit of giving titles to your poems, but in your recent collection you have given titles. Why so?

**RKS:** It is simply for the convenience of identifying a poem in a volume of selected poems. I still believe that titles tell too much, and in the new collection, no title is integral to the design of the poem. In my volume of *Collected Poems* , there are no titles.

**RBS:** How do you perceive the future of Indian English poetry?

**RKS:** It is promising. There are several new voices that have emerged on the scene since 2000 and I am confident some of them will survive as major poets.

Yet, the academia and media need to turn to poets on the periphery, read them and encourage research on their works, instead of repeating the few names only and endangering the survival of the very genre of Indian English Poetry.

**RBS:** One last question, Sir. Do you read your critics? How does unpleasant criticism affect you?

**RKS:** I read every comment on my poems that comes to my notice. Unless the comment is mischievous, motivated or deliberately written to degrade or defame me (or any other fellow poet I know), I do not react. It is important for me that they stopped by my poems (in print or electronic media) and shared their views. I feel obliged to readers who offer even unpleasant comments.

**RBS:** Thanks for sparing some time to me for an enlightening conversation.

**RKS:** I too am honoured to have a long talk with you about my poetry and myself.... All the best

[The interview, taken on 05 September 2012 at the residence of Professor R.K.Singh in Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, was first published in *Cyber Literature*, Vol.XXI, No.1, June 2013; <http://www.lit.org/view/52314> ; <https://www.scribd.com/document/105207577/Professor-R-B-Singh-interviews-Poet-R-K-Singh>

**Professor Ram Bhagwan Singh**, who writes both in English and Hindi, is now a retired university professor of English, Ranchi University. He regularly contributes book reviews and critical articles to *Cyber Literature*, a biannual research journal, published from Patna. He has authored a number of research articles and books including *The Angrez in Indo-Anglian Fiction*.

**8.**

**Titles tell too much**

**Professor R.K.Singh in an interview with Dr. A.K. Choudhary**

***AKC: Why do you write?***

**RKS:** Basically I am a poet and I write when I am moved by certain thought, idea, feeling, emotion, or experience. Any sensory, intellectual or spiritual experience may arouse me to articulate a lived or experienced moment. I write because I want to feel lighter, liberated or refreshed within. I write to seek a release from myself as much as from others; to feel free by unburdening myself in verses; to experience an inner balance, feeling, probing, sensing, recalling, or whatever. If it turns out to be a good poem, it has beauty and meaning created out of a pressing sense of inner emptiness or purposelessness of existence.

***AKC: Will you please tell us something about your childhood memories? How was your parentage and bringing up all about? Was there conditions conducive to flower your genius?***

**RKS:** I come from a humble family of Varanasi. For generations my forefathers had lived in the narrow lanes of Kashi, partaking of a culture which flourished on the bank of the Ganges that still attracts everyone, though the uniqueness I experienced in the 1950s and 1960s is gone. I was born, brought up and educated there, beginning from the School nearest to our residence, to high school, intermediate, and graduation (1970) from Harish Chandra Degree College, to M.A. (1972) from BHU, and Ph.D. (1981) from Kashi Vidyapith.

As my grandfather was a freedom fighter, frequently imprisoned along with other Congress leaders in Banaras, my father could not have formal education. He learnt to survive by himself, and learnt to read and write and did petty jobs before he could settle down in life, as he told me once. I am the eldest of his eight children who are all postgraduates and/or doctorates and fiercely independent in their views and thinking. I am proud to say that we all grew up in a secular environment with freedom to think, read and express our views.

**AKC: How would you define a good poem?**

**RKS:** A good poem generates some physical, emotional or psychosexual sensation, stimulates some sensuous, spiritual or exalted pleasure, or provokes some ideas.

I have no taste for didacticism in poetry. I love brevity, rhythm, and “colouring of human passion”; personal, lyrical, honest and free expression, with seriousness in reflection and interpretation. Poetry lies in creating the image (like the painter who celebrates sensuality), and in capturing momentness of a moment, which stirs the mind.

**AKC: How have your writings been received?**

**RKS:** Perhaps, with a sense of difference, or maybe, indifference? The established academia and the media have ignored me, as I have been writing from the margin, from a small city, where creativity in English is simply not bothered. A handful of friends and readers have, however, been very encouraging and enthusiastic about my poetry, book reviews, and articles.

**AKC: Who did help and inspire you the most in writings?**

**RKS:** Help? I doubt anybody helped me in my writings. But I did learn the art of editing (my poetry) from my poet-professor friend, Lyle Glazier (USA). He helped me edit my first two collections, *My Silence* (1985) and *Music Must Sound* (1990). He was a very positive reader of my verses and he inspired me most in the 1970s with his liberal comments and/or suggestions.

**AKC: What is your masterpiece?**

**RKS:** It is difficult to say which of my twelve collections is a masterpiece. Perhaps the best is yet to come out. However, the first collection, *My Silence* (1985), is a significant volume just as my latest collection, *The River Returns* (2006), should be a milestone in my poetic career.

**AKC: Tell something about your masterpiece.**

**RKS:** *My Silence* may be treated as a mini-epic, with ‘silence’ as the common thread. The 80 poems in the volume bear no titles; titles tell too much. But here one may discover my formal taste, personal vision, and sexual orientation rooted in Purush-Prakriti union. It is significant for open eroticism, seriousness, candor, and exaltation of Rati “to a plane where the apparent glamour of the flesh merges into a universal principle of creation,” to quote R.S. Tiwary.

**AKC:** What is your philosophy of life?

**RKS:** I believe in unity of mankind and equality of sexes, and am secular and non-moral in my attitude and values. I recognize the world as one earth, one nation, one country just as I love all the races, tribes, nationalities, religious, and languages. I accept the spiritual oneness of people and my concerns cut across national boundaries. I believe in living without prejudices as man belonging to the whole world, honest to my self.

In creative writing, I trust the autonomy of readers who must read and recreate a poem's meaning according to their own intellectual potency, taste, and sensibility without any suggestions or comments from the poet (or critic). I love my poem's exposure to different kinds/levels of meaning.

**AKC:** Which of your poems/stories are specifically autobiographical in nature?

**RKS:** Though most of my poems may have one or the other personal elements to refer to, I would not like them to be explored in terms of autobiography, for facts and fiction are so fused in my brief personal lyrics/poems, haiku, senryu, and tanka, one would succeed only in distorting and reaching the wrong conclusions.

**AKC:** What, in general, are the themes of your writings—poems and stories?

**RKS:** I am realistic and try to present facts. Maybe, sometimes I am not palatable but I don't think the aesthetic appeal is reduced. The themes of spiritual search, an attempt to understand myself and the world around me, social injustice and

disintegration, human suffering, degradation of relationship, political corruption, fundamentalism, hollowness of urban life and its false values, prejudices, loneliness, sex, love, irony, intolerance etc are prominent. In my haiku/senryu there is a deeper understanding of the quotidian as well as things in their complex simplicity.

**AKC: Tell some memorable instances that have moulded your writings.**

**RKS:** My chance encounter in 1971-72 with the poetry of Lyle Glazier for writing the M.A. dissertation proved a strong effect on my poetic sensibility. It seems it matured with personal correspondence between Professor Glazier and myself on our poetry. Further, the more I suffered rejection slips, the more determined I became to prove myself, especially in poetry. I have proved my detractors wrong, whether they recognize me or reject me.

I also learnt the art of criticism in the learned company of my teacher, the late Dr B. Chakroverty, a Tagore Scholar and critic. It was during the period I was jobless that Dr Chakroverty moulded my literary and critical sense.

Later, interaction with poet friends like O.P. Bhatnagar, I.K. Sharma, I.H. Rizvi, Krishna Srinivas, Y.S. Rajan, Niranjan Mohanty and others has also been memorable.

**AKC: Will you tell something about your visualization of the futuristic society and ethos to emerge as portrayed in your books?**

**RKS:** The ethos my poetry projects is characterized by mutual love and respect for others; tolerance of social, sexual, political, religious, and linguistic difference; and cultural dialogue and assimilation. I visualize a more liberal and tolerant mind; a more creative, more assimilative, more skilled, more aware, with a sense of caring and sharing, society. I see a future which is conscious of mutuality of concern and action, which is more integrated into global trends, which is more international, intercultural, nature-conscious, and internally spiritual.

**AKC: Is it not dream world of your books in which a thought of harmonization surfaces amidst awful conflicts and competitions?**

**RKS:** As a believer in the unity of humanity, I value the spiritual oneness of people and seek harmonious relationship. The ‘dream’ world of my poetry is very much real, exposing social attitude, morality, hypocrisy, the socio-sexual standards that determine ‘civilized’ norms, that discriminate, enchain, and debase honest aspirations as lust or vulgarity. The very exposure is an act of criticism. The lies are revealed to strike a balance and harmony in relationship.

**AKC: Are you a satisfied person vis-à-vis your literary and academic pursuits?**

**RKS:** No. Frankly, I feel sad that despite 32 books, including 12 poetry collections, about 150 academic articles, and more than 160 book reviews to my credit, I get little attention. The mainstream academia do not recognize my

contributions as an Indian English poet nor do they explore my poetry for doctoral dissertation. No big press has published me yet.

Though there seems a peculiar apathy/indifference all around, I am happy I have not wasted my time and done whatever could be possible within the constraints of my situation. I have been **supported and sustained** by small press all these years, and to that extent, I am very satisfied.

**AKC: Do you want to give any message to the readers?**

**RKS:** It will serve the cause of Indian English Writing well if you could read the new, unknown poets/writers seriously and critically, and then, if you think so, dump them, instead of rejecting them without even looking at them. A change in academics' attitude is essential.

And, please support the small press, ‘zines, and journals!

December 13, 2006

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[https://motherbird.com/Arbind\\_Choudhary.html](https://motherbird.com/Arbind_Choudhary.html) ; <http://www.lit.org/view/36990>

**Dr Arbind Kumar Choudhary**, Associate Professor, Rangachahi College, Majuli, Jorhat (Assam), is a poet, with nine collections to his credit, and reviewer. He also edits *Kohinoor* and *Ayush* magazines.

**9.**

## **Poetry Writing is an Extension of Self**

**R.K.Singh in an Interview with Rajani Kalahasti**

**KR:** What is poetry according to you and what prompted you to write poetry?

**RKS:** If the context is my poetry, it is rather you who should define it on the basis of what you gather from my poems. And, if it relates to poetry in general, there are as many definitions as poets. I doubt I would do any good by adding my ‘own’ definition which is unlikely to be original or fully applicable to my poetry.

Having said that, I would agree with the view that poetry is an art, a verbal art, which when effective, generates some physical, emotional or psychosexual sensation, stimulates some sensuous, spiritual or exalted pleasure, or provokes some mood or aesthetic sentiments, feelings, thoughts or ideas. It is also the subjective expression of a social vision, reality, or protest, and an extension of the poet’s self.

However, I have no taste for didacticism in poetry. I love brevity, rhythm and “colouring of human passion”, personal, lyrical, honest and free expression, with seriousness in reflection and interpretation.

Sometimes I also think that poetry lies in articulating momentness of a moment as lived or experienced and in continuity of memory, which is free to make illusion of

a truth or reality, and truth or reality of an illusion. To write poetry is to envision in a timeless frame of a moment inhering the pressures of the struggle for survival.

As regards the second part of your question, I write a poem to seek a release from myself as much as from others; feel free by unburdening myself in verses, and experience an inner balance, feeling, probing, sensing, recalling, or whatev. If it turns out to be a good poem, it has beauty and meaning created out of a pressing sense of inner emptiness.

Like everyone, I too pass through time, through unfulfilled desires, dreams and passions, through meaninglessness and purposelessness of an existence which questioningly stares into my eyes all the time just as I try to preserve all those small moments that offer pleasing sensations and rest to my disturbed nerves and inner being.

I also experience poetry in the brief interfusion with sex which has a rare subtlety of awareness. I feel myself in words that acquire their own existence in the process of making in a form I may not have control over: I read a new meaning in and through my verses that are, as I mentioned in a poem, often an extension of myself.

**KR:** What do you think is the prevailing trend in Indian English poetry today?

**RKS:** Indian English is not area-specific: it is a collaborative effort of Indian poets from every region/part of India, like Sanskrit or Urdu, with distinctive ethos. Some of them with English Literature background and aware of the ‘theory revolution’ of the 1970s – feminist, Marxist, Postcolonial, pragmatist, cultural materialist, etc. – may also have a ‘different’ understanding of ‘literariness’, but most of the practicing Indian English poets demonstrate a wider sense of community, social harmony, tolerance of differences, and cultural and religious integration. Some of them are more international in spirit than poets in regional languages though many

of them (writing in regional languages) do seem to share the same international or global attitude as against the on-going barbarisms and political correctness, and misplaced notions of superiority or guilt. When I view thus, I ignore all those poets who present a moralizing discourse, preach or assert cultural authority and dogmatism, or make Romantic-apocalyptic utterances.

**KR:** Can you specify the reason for the decadent morality in the youth of India?

**RKS:** Poetry has nothing to do with the decadent morality of the youth....What you observe as decadent these days is simply part of the new consumerist cosmopolitan culture. I won't call it decadent. It is rather fast pace of development of the IT dominated new world of work, making the old link between the adult world and the child world very weak.

The new changes, or the crossover of trends and fashions, may be generating a feeling of existential urgency; the sublime seems to be melding with the trivial and the creative with the conventional. A sort of re-orientation is going on so rapidly that the established old concepts of morality etc. appear outdated. I won't call the shift from the idealist to the materialist view as decadent.

You may feel out of the place or irrelevant in the new or emerging society, but it is today's reality: this is going to stay, even if 'decadent' or mad, alongside the old, till the process of transformation is complete, and people everywhere, across cultures and societies, have something common to say, something new and different but universally shared.

**KR:** Is it possible to rehabilitate the spoilt youth with the poetry of social reality?

**RKS:** I don't think. Nor do I agree with what your question implies. Poetry, of whatever hue or reality, can at best create some awareness, hone some finer

feelings, present some specialist perceptions, reflect ones mind and soul, and remain part of cultural activities and a form of literary communication, but I doubt it can mould a society by itself. It has no utilitarian function, even as reading it could be liberating to those who can grasp what is at issue. Poetry doesn't help in saving lives, winning wars, or rehabilitating a spoilt youth.

**KR:** Can ‘Peace’ be the perfect remedy to every peril?

**RKS:** Hope, you are not replacing ‘Poetry’ with “Peace”. Peace is not synonymous with poetry but one can sublimate ones desperations and even outgrow the external threats through poetry. Peace is necessary for poetry, for interpreting perils of awareness.

**KR:** Is it good to drift away from ‘main stream’ literature, i.e. British Literature, so that an identity could be evolved for Indian Writing in English?

**RKS:** In this time of knowledge society and proliferation of technological artifacts, all traditional arts have suffered. Literature or poetry is no exception. The issue of its little utilitarian worth and relevance vis-à-vis the emerging hybridization of cultural (and literary) identity will continue to haunt till some new patrons appear on the scene and accord an identity to Indian English creativity. Moreover, the poets have always been in search of identity.

Howsoever despairing it might look today, including the drift from the mainstream, I see in the ensuing future through the upheavals today a process of perfection rather than destruction: “I have come not to abolish, but to bring to fulfillment”, to quote a verse (Mt.5:17) from the Bible. Something good is giving way to something more perfect in Indian English Writing, too. Yet, to maintain a reasonable academic standard IEW could be studies as part of ‘Literatures in English’ without excluding British or American Literature.

**KR:** What is your message to the reader of your poetry?

**RKS:** I doubt I write to construct a ‘message’ as such. But I do think that we should understand our personal concerns honestly and broaden the mind; re-tune our beliefs and prejudices, promoting tolerance for differences and mutual respect, particularly at a time when power is being blatantly expressed through control of knowledge, technology, research, economy, and change, through manipulation of the media—print, visual and internet, through hegemonic politics of War on terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, human rights, third world poverty, democracy, environment, and globalisation et al; and appraise our survival vis-à-vis religious, casteist and ethnic conflicts, regional fundamentalism, violence of the right wing, and marginalisation of a large part of our society. I would feel rewarded if my poetry helps create cultural space for others to belong and defuses socioreligious tensions. Our living together in a global civilization or world peace will not be possible without some sort of global ethos on part of our poets and politicians.

**KR:** Is writing poetry of social reality easier than writing Nature Poetry/Romantic Poetry?

**RKS:** No. As I said in the beginning, writing poetry is an art and it requires taste and sensibility to create, whether it is nature poetry or romantic poetry. The poet needs to articulate his creative perception of meaning in the world using meaning-making devices such as rhythm, tone, imagery, symbolism, myth, without excluding awareness of the present. This is what you also explore to highlight the poet’s social consciousness. So, nothing is easy.

**KR:** Will it be appropriate to use erotic metaphors in the poetry of social reality?

**RKS:** Why not? Social reality is not devoid of the private and sexual. Erotic metaphors reveal the secret and profound truths about the individual or his/her social consciousness. In the oriental poetry and art, sexual experiences illuminate realities and are not devoid from other human experiences such as eating and sleeping. Erotic imagery has a transpersonal dimension.

In fact, the problem is not sex/sexuality but social attitude, false morality, hypocrisy, the socio-sexual standards that determine ‘civilised’ norms, that discriminate, enchain, and debase honest aspirations as lust or vulgarity.

As I mentioned in an article somewhere, erotic imagery helps us to explore relationships, concerns, roles, ethical and cultural values. The image of the human body reveals the human soul, the inner landscape, besides interpreting the outer awareness. Isn’t it the basic truth that we are flesh in sensuality? And this is not without social reality. By denying or negating the erotic, the fleshly unity, we deny the social reality itself.

The assimilation of the world of everyday thing, including sex, and the world that is foreign, mysterious, or uncertain in the poet’s vision is an aspect of social reality but what matters is the poet’s ability to answer particular questions made out at a given time, elaborating and extending the commonsense world.

**KR :** How far does your poetry fulfil the social obligation of reforming the degenerating society?

**RKS:** I don’t think I have written poetry with any idealistic notion. Nor do I share the view what poetry can teach one about politics, ethics, history, morality or social revolution. I don’t look to it for social salvation. Nor has poetry ever changed a degenerating situation anywhere in the world. It might assimilate, inhere or portray a degenerating situation, but it can’t change it. My poetry commits no such obligation. Nor can poetry or criticism become a basis for societal reform.

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## **10.**

### **Sex is God-ordained, a metaphor**

**R.K. Singh talks to Kanwar Dinesh Singh**

**KDS:** What do you think your poetry is about?

**RKS:** Much depends on the *insight* into how you respond to my poetry or how delightful to the senses or challenging to the mind you find it, or how you want to interpret my creative perception of meaning in the world. There are many themes, individual passion, historic-mythical awareness, human relationship, social consciousness: I am my own veil and revelation; I am both the subject and the object and reveal others as much as I reveal myself.

I utilize the world which we live in order to create an authentic voice, which begets empathy and brings the reader in close contact with the poem. In addition, it demonstrates my choice of the subject matter I am exploring... Hope, there is no ban on certain topics and there is nothing wrong in expressing sex or bringing the private into public.

**KDS:** The critics call your poetry erotic. How far do you agree with them?

**RKS:** I don't know many of them really appreciate what is genuinely *erotic* in one's poetry. In the subjective process of creation, it is normal for a poet to create out of himself: whatever outside he sees excites the inner vision; if he feels sex as truth and, as Sri Aurobindo says, renders the experience with beauty or power, there is nothing objectionable.

The fact is, my social vision intersects the private and sexual; there is some sense in a poet's frenetic eroticism or sexuality—love the self through exploration of the body, or naked physicality, leading to love of the divine, or man and woman as one.

I believe the effect of poetry lies in the thrill, the almost physical emotion that comes with its reading. The appeal of the erotic poetry lies in the activation of the sense, mind and the emotions that appear in some way interpretative of life, or subjective experiences that have depth. It is perhaps in the area of sex—a fact of daily life—that one must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual or his/her social consciousness. The problem is not so much sex/sexuality but social *attitude*, morality, hypocrisy, the socio-social standards that determine ‘civilized’ norms, that discriminate, enchain and debase honest aspirations as lust or vulgarity.

To me sex is a metaphor: the encounter of man and woman, woman and woman, man and man to express relationships, concerns, roles, to react against false ethical and cultural values, against stereotypes and prejudices, against hypocrisy. (But beware of gimmicks, imitations, romantic overtures, and even plain silliness that I have often noticed in a number of Indian English poets.) It is through the inner mindscape that the outer awareness is interpreted.

Further, I think expression of love and sex in my poetry is the internalized substitute, nay antidote, to the fast dehumanizing existence without, and ever in conflict with my search for life, search for meaning in a sort of routinised, boring existence.

Woman in my poetry (is that what makes it erotic?) is a universal woman, the invisible part of the primordial pairs we know as Purush-Prakriti, or Yin-Yang, unchanging over time and culture. I see woman (and her *nudity*) as the mainspring of our being (and art), as “the major incident in man’s life,” shaping the psyche and constituting the sensory experience. She is eternal and there is no poetry possible without her. I sing of woman who is both my passion and interest, who is the balance point of various beings, the very cause and end of life, perhaps the means to rediscover the original magic of life.

Far from being just erotic, I think I often talk about myself, withdrawn into my personal world; to me, perhaps, it is a means of defying the disgusting sociopolitical world outside, or a form of actively resisting political manipulation. By writing brief, personal lyrics, or confining myself to the privacy of love-making, I make my life a work of art, or enlarge myself to the universal sameness

of human feelings. Do I need to emphasize that human passion, including the sexual, should get an artistic expression to be effective? As a poet I try to transmute and transmit memories of experience, possibly more with a sense of irony than eroticism.

In fact, the question for consideration should be, how I write and what I write about; does it have some relevance to how existence filters through our centres of perception? If I make readers feel that they have a stake in the emotion being exposed, I think I have succeeded as a poet.

**KDS:** If you really think your poetry is erotic, please elaborate what actually is erotic in your poetry?

**RKS:** It is for my readers (and critics) to define what is actually erotic in my poetry. To me human body is a picture of the human soul I celebrate to understand the world and the self. I glorify nudity to explore the consciousness, the inner landscape lost in the muddle of the external chaos.

Also, we are flesh in sensuality and there is divinity in it. How sad, people are quick to deny it, but as a poet I acknowledge the basic truth. The fleshly unity is the reality, the passage to experience divinity, but its expression is looked down upon by certain sections. Why? Wasn't the taste of the forbidden fruit in Eden the awareness of physical attraction in man and woman? Wasn't the Tree of Knowledge actually the knowledge of the process of creation, of love, of sex?

I am convinced the Bible, like the ancient Hindu scriptures, does not decry sex. Nor is sex something bad. In fact, Biblically celebration of physical union is God-ordained; man and woman are expected to stay together, love each other as their own flesh.

Because God created human beings as *male* and *female*, He created sex and ordained sexual union (in a socially acceptable form) to bind man and woman together, as husband and wife, not necessarily to procreate (there is plenty of procreation without marriage!) but to lead a healthy emotional life through love and sex.

As I see it, it is God's design that we enjoy life, be happy, be one flesh in coitus, and thus glorify Him in body. As I understand reading through our ancient scriptures, the Vedas and the Upanishads, sex is the source of happiness in equality, in oneness of man and woman, in love.

The search for love, or the intense desire for sex, even if erotic, in my poetry is essentially the aspiration for 'entering into another' to know, to understand. It is rather a search for the 'whole' in daily living and giving. It is the search for a bridge between the uncontrollable external events and the often impulsive, subjective, or internal responses, the secret neurosis, if I may say so. Its very presentation is *the criticism* because each poem reveals my way of seeing the world. Therefore, what is important is the poem's analysis and interpretation.

The reader/critic should have a taste for imagery, symbolism, irony and awareness of the present to explore my art, psyche or imagination, my sense of freedom through poetic self-expression. She/he should also be willing to appreciate variations on sexuality in poetry since the 1960s – nakedness, nudity, sensuality, obsession, imagined or real pleasure, woman's body as the form, object and route to inner reality to mitigate spiritual dissatisfaction. It is ultimately positive as it helps to relate our existence to poetry's existence as art, something that protects us from violence without.

**KDS:** When did you write your first erotic poem and what was the motivation behind?

**RKS:** I was a boy when I started writing (in Hindi) and was in my early twenties when I switched over to writing in English. I can't say when exactly I composed a poem with erotic content. [“The best poetry/is a woman/concrete, personal, delightful/greater than all” (22-10-72) or “While I was petting and necking/lying over her body/she was calculating whether/she could afford a new saree/from what I would pay her/tonight” (14-4-73). Do you call these early poems erotic?] But expression of sex in my poetry is gradual evolution. *My Silence* (1985), my first collection, uses sex imagery more with a spiritual sense than the erotic.

You will note that I have not been writing like most of our academic poets write. But I do seek spiritual satisfaction, creating poetry with mundane moments that are alive, stimulating and diverse. I possibly try to bring up a vivid suggestion of the thing seen or experienced, even if sexual, through which one can get at the life behind and its meaning.

**KDS:** What and when is an erotic mood? How do you experience it?

**RKS:** If you read *My Silence and Other Selected Poems* (1996) and *Above the Earth's Green* (1997) you may find I am writing a song of myself, sometimes speaking in the same voice as the sensuous friezes of the walls of the Sun Temple at Konark. Many of our thousand years old sculptures are an undisguised exaltation of physical desires; yet they are great works of art because their eroticism is part of our philosophy, it's our heritage. You should also appreciate the purity of intention, the desire to distill from the smallest experience the largest, most universal insight—something which unites us all.

As is normal in lyric poetry, there is simplicity of language, and imagery is not only vivid, personal and universal, but also intuitive ,and therefore, unexpected and profound.

And if you want to understand the process of ‘erotic creation’, it is like meeting ones lover, who has never been seen and felt naked, nor so enjoyed, but who always thrilled and aroused a pleasing sensation making the mind act, as in copulation, and experiencing the climax together, the ever-inviting orgasmic pleasure and gradual relaxation, again and again. A process of exhilaration, stimulation and relaxation, swimming through the river of heavenly happiness, uniting eye, mind, and imagination, and losing ignorance. That is what keeps a poet or artist going, giving birth to new works, one after the other, reaching a height to feel silence through spirit in the body.

**KDS:** What, according to you, is the aesthetic of erotica?

**RKS:** There is a ‘poem’ (composed on 17-4-73) which I never found publishable, but I should like to mention it just to say that my thoughts were always clear:

When I draw my images from sex  
and draw too much  
to covey my feelings  
I do not mean to offend  
but to tell that  
sex is the ancilla of art  
sweet, simple and direct  
joy of aesthetics  
true aim of poetry

As for the aesthetics of erotica, I must admit the subject is very difficult and I have no background to talk about it with authority, though I believe it is essentially to illuminate the realities of life through body-images.

Erotic – painting, pornography, poetry—is a means to know the world; it enhances the value of sexual symbolism by referring to actual sexual experience with its pleasure, pain and ecstasy. Our ancient erotic manuals, *Kamasutra*, *Kokashastra*, and *Ratirahasya* treat love as a matter of giving and receiving pleasure. The aesthetics of erotica, the sexual metaphor makes it possible to convey what it feels like to be filled with desire; such a state, in our classics, has been valued highly, as sexual love is seen as a means of access to the realm where human and divine meet.

In a nutshell, depiction of sex in India has been metaphysically serious, just as sexual desire and fulfillment is an action of the spirit in body, leading to pleasure and harmony.

**KDS:** How will you separate erotica from pornography?

**RKS:** Long ago in a review in *Indian Literature* (March-April 1984) I had drawn attention to an *attitudinal* problem of several ‘tradition’ loving orthodox readers who cannot respond to sexual metaphors in the right spirit. As poets and critics, we must learn to differentiate between what is physically balanced, confident,

sublime (nude) in art. For example, in a context “Fuck me” could be crude and pornographic but “Love me” can make it sensual and provocative.

Pornography, like a mass of naked figures, does not move us to empathy, but to disgust and dismay. It is obvious by excess, the grotesque, and the perverse. The nude, or the erotic, on the other hand, is pleasing and elevating to the senses and the artist and the poet knows that the naked body is a pretext for a work of art, it can be made expressive of a far wider and more civilizing experience. As Kenneth Clark observes in *The Nude* (1956), “It is ourselves, and arouses memories of all the things we wish to do with ourselves.”

What may appear objectionable or vulgar in many a contemporary poet in India (or abroad) is actually the expression of the real human needs and experience, the physical body re-formed or sex acts re-enacted, with a sense of shared delight. The sexual imagery conveys a mixture of memories and sensations, a desire to perpetuate ourselves in the complex of living; it is the word made flesh, full of grace and truth, and we should not decry this.

**KDS:** How will you defend yourself if someone levels against you the charge of obscenity, overindulgence, sensuality and sentimentalism?

**RKS:** Would I really need to defend myself? ...Let me make a few points clear to you before I respond to this question.

I believe sexual self-expression is ones fundamental right and poets and artists should be free to make their decision with their own conscience; in fact the right to write on a subject is borne out from how well the poet honours that subject, how well he inhabits it, and how well he engages the reader.

I also believe personal freedom of choice and tolerance for diversity are the hallmarks of a liberated, enlightened society. I would, therefore, be denied my freedom if somebody seeks to question my creativity in the name of religion, morality or decency; the violent orthodoxy of the right wing vis-à-vis ones search for happiness through sex (or what you call the erotic) is deplorable...Let's not corrupt the refinements of life achieved through effort, over several centuries.

I must caution you here we are unlikely to reject the physical; sex is going to stay, as it is the core of personal and societal stability, and there is no room for any kind of coercive control to regulate its expression or discussion in life or literature.

Having asserted my belief, now I come to yet another point. If you like poetry, you should distinguish between poems that derive from sexperience and that use sex imagery to make comments or express a viewpoint. I do not debase sex or celebrate something outrageous; I also do not highlight sex in any negative sense (to promote, for example, promiscuity or unhealthy behavior).

Sex is something *positive* in the structure and texture of my poetry... Maybe, sometimes I might be *exposing* what is usually suppressed in the socalled civilized society, or blending reality and fantasy, through my awareness?

Perhaps my poetry has been misunderstood for its sensory images or sexual references. In fact most of my short poems *suggest* rather than *narrate*, allowing readers to use their imagination to derive their own meaning. One may find different meanings at different times, especially when I write (or re-create) what is in front of my senses at the time of writing.

I doubt a serious analysis of my poems will ever prove that I am obscene or sentimental. Sensual, perhaps yes, because I have a style to communicate what could be experientially true; the readers might feel it. But, as I said, in the totality of my poems, sexpression is just one of the several aspects, and *not* the only aspect of my poetry.

**KDS:** Erotica involves psychological problems along with physical descriptions. How far do you agree?

**RKS:** I don't know, because I have no systematic exposure to the subject. However, I understand erotic poetry has its own long tradition in our country: it seeks the spirit through the body. It is part of a genre in itself. Physical love is one of its main constituents, but academically what matters is, an understanding of the tradition and your own interpretation.

Each poet has his/her own psychosexual perspective, which you, as a reader, should be able to draw from the totality of poems. If there are any psychological complexes, a discerning reader should be able to discover. As far as I am concerned, despite the proverbial poetic madness, erotic love or physical description (which is hardly elaborated) is just one of the many aspects and not *the* aspect, nor am I a creator of erotica *per se*.

**KDS:** Has Freud to do something in your poetry?

**RKS:** Do I really write something unusual? ... I doubt sexpression in my poetry admits of Freudian psychoanalysis. There has been no sexual *repression* in my personal life, though sometimes I might appear self-indulgent.

But unburdening myself in verses enables me to seek an inner balance. Sometimes I seek a release from myself as much as from others; feeling, probing, experiencing, recalling, just to build beauty and meaning, often out of pressing sense of inner emptiness. Like everyone, I pass through time, through unfulfilled desires, dreams and passions, through meaninglessness and purposelessness of an existence which questioningly stares into my eyes all the time, just as I try to preserve all those small moments that offer pleasing sensations and rest to my disturbed inner being.

I also experience *poetry* in the brief interfusion with sex which has a rare subtlety of awareness. I feel myself in words that acquire their own existence in the process of making in a form I may not have control over: I too read a new meaning in my poems.

**KDS:** What kind of treatment does love find in erotica?

**RKS:** From what I have said so far, you can understand that if one has taste and skill, experience of erotic love will generate, besides some genuinely physical sensation-- the desire to grasp and be united with another human body us a fundamental part of our nature--, a transcending spiritual effect and meaning. You can have a glimpse of it in poets like Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bhartrihari, Amaru,

Yashovarman, Jayadeva, and others, collected in Penguin's *Poems From the Sanskrit*, tr. John Borough.

You should read *Gitagovinda* (by Jayadeva) for the poet's frank eroticism, but you cannot appreciate the poet's treatment of love, or emotional lyricism without viewing his cultural contexts which include his personal mood or taste, and aesthetics of creation.

Though today there may be more *naked* love—consumerist, commercial and open—but sex is still intrinsically *good* and adds to the dimensions of depth and mystery to erotic feeling. There is substance in what Sri Aurobindo had observed in 1932 that there is room for sex poetry if it is felt as truth.

**KDS:** How will you relate erotica to sociocultural ethicmorality?

**RKS:** Have you read the *Kamasutra*? How does Vatsyayan relate to sexual etiquette, complete with lists of do's and don'ts, and intimately bound up with Hindu attitudes to social conduct and the sexual mores of giving and getting pleasure? View expression of the erotic in the same fashion as Vatsyayan did. He considered sexuality as an integral part of the whole nature's activity, and is as much a religious expression of longing for the primordial unity as of individual passion.

Can't we treat a poet's sensual expression of the creative force, the male and female aspects of life, as something well-established in our culture? What is wrong if poets write about masculine and feminine excellence, or beauty with a sense of the splendor of sex, just for its own sake and enrich literature and art?

Let's not forget prior to medieval Hindu rigidity, and Muslim and British Puritanism, Indian society had equality in male-female relationship, with pleasure-principle in the centre. Writers and poets were preoccupied with erotic affairs between 500 BC and 500 AD, and treated sex very frankly. There is no harm if today they articulate their private, domestic, or social life in terms of sex, sexuality or intimate passions. They lay before us, *in today's language and contexts*, a wealth of metaphorical implication in the acts and qualities of the sexual love they portray.

**KDS:** How far is erotica a subjective literature?

**RKS:** If an artist is looking for perfection—perfection of the human body—s/he expresses it subjectively. Celebration of the naked body , in part or whole, is entirely a personal and subjective act; it is part of one's search for *pleasure*, physical, aesthetic, or imaginary. I don't know if there is any pure form as such. I am no expert and can't say much, except that it is a matter of attitude: some may respect expression of the erotic, some may not. Its *making* and *reading*, both are subjective.

**KDS:** How is your poetry comparable with the classical erotica?

**RKS:** I doubt I am classical or comparable with the great poets reading whom one may be motivated to structure ones own erotic feelings. I don't claim eroticism in my poetry is reflective of any devotional or religious sentiments; it is secular; I recognize wisdom of the Body, which is worth loving for its grace, truth and reality. And if one seeks to make the word flesh, one must be also adept at revealing rather than concealing. Perhaps the carnal, sexual references make my poetry vital and dynamic. I am perhaps most alive in the midst of my passion, which is sometimes sexual.

**KDS:** How will you account for the place of erotica in literature?

**RKS:** In a country like ours, where art, religion and sexual love have been completely fused, study of erotica is a discipline, or as part of literature, should make us aware of our rich culture. We will know ourselves better better if, for example, we also know the significance of worshipping the divine phallus—lingam—which unifies the supreme principles of male and female. Erotica—human sexuality—if presented and used properly, should help us ‘recombine’ the primordial male-female polarity into one energy which could then make life in harmony with the Original Source, bring the individual and humanity closer, and

promote stable sexual relations. If used unwisely, it may generate into a diffracted and miserable world.

**KDS:** What actually do you wish to convey by way of erotic themes to your audience?

**RKS:** I think I have already responded to it in your other questions.... Readers are free to interpret my poems according to their own taste and understanding.

**KDS:** Any other aspect of eroticism in your poetry you would like to enlighten?

**RKS:** Well, as poets we must respond to changes in ourselves: we are the chroniclers of change in our own individual ways. It is the whisperings, shouts, and screams of our hearts that we write about. We should not shun sexual stimulation or appeal to the sensual imagination of men and women. Whether I am politically or socially oriented, dealing with long lost or new found love, bubbling with happiness or drowning in depression, my poetry reflects evolution within my experiences and passions...Who knows tomorrow someone discovers a new meaning in the pattern of my erotic perception, too!

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## **11.**

### **A good poem makes me smile**

#### **R.K. Singh in an interview with Dr Atma Ram**

**AR:** Your three best writings/books?

**RKS:** Although I am yet to produce my best book or poem, I think among books *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic* (1984) and *My Silence* (1985) are the books I may mention as important. *Savitri* has been studied for the first time on the lines of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* without recourse to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy as a critical tool. *My Silence* has immense possibilities for interpretation from independent short untitled lyrics to a long poem. *Memories Unmemoried* (1988) is qualitatively better and formally an improvement upon *My Silence*.

**AR** What are your hobbies?

**RKS:** Reading books on erotic art, painting and literature; Yoga; analysis of dreams; and Biochemic medicines besides reading and writing poetry.

**AR:** Could you sketch a typical day in your life?

**RKS:** A deadly monotony of existence in the maze of routine is what characterizes a typical day in my life: while mentally it is a journey from loneliness to frustration to depression, physically it criss-crosses the routine of living in the same house, working in the same place, meeting the same people, teaching batch after batch the

same unwilling-to-learn students; the same time of getting up, eating and sleeping; the same worries and complaints; the same diseases; the same unfulfilled desires; the same uninspiring atmosphere; the same prayers; the same narrowing dimensions and captivation; the same insecurity and marginalization; and the same search for freedom; the same sense perception probing sex, city or people; and yet, unable to know myself or to forget the growing depression.

**AR:** Was there any incident/episode that had immense effect on your sensibility?

**RKS:** It seems my encounter (in 1971-72) with the poetry of the American poet-professor Lyle Glazier (*Orchard Park and Istanbul*, 1965; *You Too*, 1969; *Voices of the Dead*, 1971; and *Dervishes*, 1971) for writing the M.A. dissertation ('Lyle Glazier: A Contextual Study of His Poetry') has proved a strong effect on my poetic sensibility. It seems it has matured with personal correspondence between Glazier and myself on our poetry. Further, the more my friends tried to dissuade me from writing verses in English in the two years of my nearness to them, the more I stuck to practicing poetry in English.

**AR:** When and how did you start your writing career?

**RKS:** I wrote my first poem in Hindi (published in 'Aj' of Varanasi) as a boy of 12 in June 1962. I practiced several poems and published most of them in newspapers and magazines like *Sanmarg*, *Gandiva*, *Samachar Times*, *Yugpath*, *Friends World*, *Raswanti*, *Jyotishmati*, *Tarun*, *Vishwas* etc under the pen-name 'Tahira'. I also published over 150 journalistic articles besides 8-10 stories in Hindi upto 1971-72.

As I became well aware that my articles were more read and popular than the poems, from 1968-69 I started writing in English as well, and produced a large number of third-rate verses. The first successful poem, 'Life' appeared in a Deutsche Welle Club magazine from Allahabad in February 1968.

As the influences of the Romantic, Victorian and the socalled modern poets waned, the phase of preparation had completed with my attempt at writing 'diary' in verses from October 1972 to December 1973. There was a lot to feel and say after

leaving the monotonous life at Varanasi and going to Pulgaon, returning to Varanasi again and visiting several places, going to Lucknow, New Delhi and finally to Bhutan, where from March 1974 to November 1975 I composed almost one poem a day: the Bhutan period was poetically most fertile and motivating.

Coming to Dhanbad in February 1976, almost sick of nature and loneliness in Bhutan, I had a ‘pressure’ for writing my thesis on *Savitri* almost without any help (1976-1980) while the poetic stuff was provided by the worst of human nature in the zoo of ISM, my place of work. With every passing day my poetry perfected here both inform and content.

**AR:** The source of inspiration for your creative activities?

**RKS:** For the last few years my dreams in sleep, personal experiences with people in waking life and reading *good* writing have been inspiring my creativity.

**AR:** At what time do you compose poems?

**RKS:** There is no fixed time: I have composed poems while walking, eating, taking bath, or defecating, just as I have composed poems soon after getting up or while reading a book or article.

**AR:** How often do you revise your poems?

**RKS:** Perhaps rarely. A weak poem makes me aware of its weaknesses right at the time of composition and therefore it is read and improved upon within the first half-an-hour of its writing and then forgotten about. I learnt the art of editing poetry while preparing the manuscripts of *My Silence*, thanks to Lyle Glazier, who emphasized the importance of economy in expression, which is now part of my process of composition.

**AR:** Do you enjoy writing poetry?

**RKS:** Yes, I feel spiritually satisfied after completing a poem.

**AR:** How could you describe the process of creation in your case?

**RKS:** Some small, negligible aspect of one's behavior, or some insignificant event, or something read or heard in the past either stays unconsciously in the memory and gets connected some other time while something incites me into a poem, or I get my own 'thoughts' as I read somebody else's poem (or article or book), or I recollect some complex dream experiences into the garb of a poem. I see to it that the emotion thus expressed *makes sense* to me as an ordinary reader (or critic), and is not mere claptrap in the form of a poem. I also check there is some sort of rhythm or pattern in the expression and no waste of words. Since the poetic mood is short-lived, the poems are almost always short, and as there is hardly a poem composed with a title integral to it, I prefer not to give title to my poems.

**AR:** Is poetry/writing a spontaneous creation for you?

**RKS:** Yes, poetry writing is more or less a spontaneous creation to me; article or review writing is a complex process of pre-writing, writing and post-writing stages.

**AR:** Do words come naturally to you or you have to struggle?

**RKS:** Sometimes words come naturally, and sometimes I must find the right word with the 'correct' shade of meaning. Sometimes I must look up a dictionary to check myself or find a substitute or to get a word with desired number of syllables. But if I have to 'struggle' anytime, I must give up and forget about the poem.

**AR:** When you start writing a poem, do you know how it is going to end?

**RKS:** It depends. But most often I sense about its ending only towards the last three-four lines, and not in the beginning.

**AR:** Would you like to revise any of your poems?

**RKS:** Yes, I should like to revise many of the poems composed 15-20 years ago and not published because they are simply too bad to be published.

**AR:** To what extent is your poetry autobiographical?

**RKS:** To a limited extent. I should not like my poems to be explored in terms of autobiography, for fact and fiction are so welded in my brief, lyrical personal poems, one would only succeed in distorting and reaching to wrong conclusions.

**AR:** Is your poetry always symbolic?

**RKS:** Perhaps not. However, it is strongly symbolic where I draw on my dream experiences.

**AR:** How does your vernacular/mother tongue influence your English?

**RKS:** When I write in English, I think in English. But sometime a particular idea, for want of the exact English term or word at some juncture of creativity may be posing problem which, if not sorted out with the help of a dictionary or thesaurus, can be overcome by using a Hindi (or other) word, provided it seems natural and easy to follow. I use Hindi (or other foreign) word as part of my thought-processes.

**AR:** What is a good poem?

**RKS:** A good poem makes me smile or feel happy. It must not be long—the shorter the better—and have a pattern, rhythm, and meaning. If it is too cerebral or beyond my intellectual emotional experiences, or too idealistic, it is unnatural and replete with artificial emotion.

**AR:** What is the most distinctive feature of contemporary Indian poetry?

**RKS:** I will say sex, irony, urban life and its false values, social injustice and disintegration, human sufferings, degradation of relationship and spiritual search are some of the features of Indian English Poetry.

**AR:** What is deficient in contemporary Indian English Poetry?

**RKS:** Although the contemporary Indian English Poetry is growing up as part of a collective tradition, most of its young practitioners are virtually unmindful of form and rhythm. What is needed is a sense of refinement in articulation of thoughts with an ear for music. Experimentation at various levels, too, is needed.

**AR:** Don't you think Indian English Literature needs Indian aesthetics for its proper appreciation?

**RKS:** Indian aesthetics can be applied to appreciate Indian English creativity, though I don't think it should be a must. We should be open to all aesthetics in order to develop a distinct Indian English criticism in the future.

**AR:** Your attitude to critics?

**RKS:** Critics are the best friends, and I regard them for their guidance, appreciation and assistance (in whatever way) in my creativity.

**AR:** What is your philosophy of life?

**RKS:** I believe in unity of mankind and equality of sexes, and am secular and non-moral in my attitude and values. I recognize the world as one earth, one nation, one country just as I love all the races, tribes, nationalities, religions and languages. I accept the spiritual oneness of people and my concerns cut across national boundaries. I believe in living without prejudices as man belonging to the whole world, honest to my self.

**AR:** Why do you write in English?

**RKS:** I write in English because English became a natural medium to express myself. Moreover, as my sensibility is essentially international, English as an international medium facilitates my expression.

And, it is Indian English to the extent I come from Indian culture just as I express myself from within the most familiar culture, communicating my Indianness—imagery, thought, tone, rhythm, argument etc—which is all sustained by the Indian environment. Maybe, the medium distances me from the larger masses (no knowing English) and to that extent I may appear elitist, but I’m sure I don’t write for the illiterate people, even for the non-educated millions, because, to them, writing in any language, including the native language, will mean nothing. English is my medium by choice, and I firmly believe it is a neutral medium too, therefore it serves my aesthetic needs well.

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**Dr Atma Ram**, retired Director of Education, Himachal Pradesh, is a distinguished academician, educationist, administrator and writer, with more than thirty books and over a hundred research articles to his credit. Recipient of Himachal Sahitya Akademi Award and other honours, he lives in Dharamsala (H.P.)

## **12.**

### **I am my own veil and revelation**

#### **Dr R.K.Singh in an interview with Jaswinder Singh**

**JS:** Please tell us something about yourself.

**RKS:** I come from a humble family of Varanasi. For generations my forefathers had lived in the narrow lanes of Banaras, partaking of a culture which flourished on the bank of the Ganges that still attracts everyone, though the uniqueness is gone, values have changed, you know. I was born, brought up and educated there, beginning from the school nearest to our residence to high school, intermediate, and graduation (1970)from Harish Chandra Degree College, to M.A. (1972) from Banaras Hindu University, and Ph.D. (1981) from Kashi Vidyapith.

As my grandfather was a freedom fighter, frequently imprisoned along with other Congress leaders in Banaras, my father could not have formal education. He learnt to survive by himself, learnt to read and write and did many petty jobs before he could settle down in life. I am the eldest of his eight children who are all postgraduates and doctorates and fiercely independent in their views and thinking.

Though I started my career as a journalist, I switched over to teaching, finding it more congenial, and now, away from my roots in the interiors of Varanasi, I have been living in Dhanbad since February 1976. It is here, after joining Indian School of Mines as faculty, that I was married in 1978, blessed with two children, and have been able to establish myself as an academic, and perhaps, poet too.

Professionally, I am a teacher of English language skills. In fact I am an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) practitioner, and have been teaching EST (English for Science and Technology), mostly writing skills, to tertiary and post-tertiary level students of earth and mineral sciences for about three decades. I dabble in

literature teaching also to interested undergraduate students , exploiting ESP techniques to develop literary and critical sense, but I claim no expertise of the kind my colleagues in the mainstream university departments may have.

I have published 24 books, including nine collections of poems, over 125 academic articles on English Language and Indian English literary practices, and over 135 book reviews. My poems have appeared in over 140 journals and 90 anthologies.

**JS:** When did you find a poet in you?

**RKS:** Perhaps in the early ‘60s. I remember writing my first poem in Hindi at the age of 12. It appeared in the daily ‘Aj’ of Varanasi. Since then I have been writing and publishing regularly. From 1965 to 1972, I even participated in a few Kavi Sammelans also. Perhaps my first poem in English composed in 1968 appeared in the Deutsche Welle Club (radio) magazine. A couple of my early poems were also published in *Adam and Eve* (Madras).

**JS:** What was your feeling when you discovered that poetry may spring out of your imagination?

**RKS:** It was and is something like an event, an incident occurring suddenly, a gradual buildup of tension in the mind, and then, as the poem progresses and ends, feeling free/released from pressure. It’s a wonderful sense of tension and relaxation, something self-motivating to write again and again, experiencing a different kind of joy at the end, even if I hardly know in the beginning what shape a poem is going to take.

**JS:** Did you enter the field of English literature by chance or it was out of your love for it?

**RKS:** Maybe, it was by chance? ... Initially as I was already exposed to Hindi poetry and was motivated by my publication success in small magazines and newspapers, I had the ambition to become a writer or journalist. (I never wanted to

be a teacher.) I was a science student, but I hardly enjoyed (or even understood) Physics, Chemistry and Maths. Since I already had a lot of diversion as part-time column writer, poet, and youth activist during 1966-1970, I was sure I won't succeed doing B.Sc. or get a good division. So, in the middle of the session in 1968-69, I decided to do B.A. and opted for the subjects that I enjoyed reading. English literature happened to be one of them. Later, I did M.A. in English literature with specialization in American Literature and topped the list of successful students of my batch in 1972. But since 1974, I have been professionally involved in the field of English Language Teaching rather than English Literature teaching.

**JS:** What inspires you to write poetry?

**RKS:** Let me think... For many years my dreamt dreams, personal experiences with people in waking life, reading good writing/verses, or seeing good painting (or work of art) have inspired my creativity. Some part is also played by the completely demotivating environment of campus life in Dhanbad. Now any small negligible aspect of one's behavior or attitude, any insignificant event, anything can inspire me to compose a poem, if it can express 'momentness of a moment' or become an imagery. Even something read or heard in the past may get connected with some thing Now and incite me into a poem.

I am also inspired by human body which is the best picture of the human soul: I glorify it. We are flesh in sensuality and there is divinity in it. It is ever refreshing to me to express love and sex, the internalized substitute, or antidote, to the fast dehumanizing existence without and ever in conflict with my search for life. It helps me enlarge my self to the universal sameness of human feelings.

**JS:** Poets are born, not made. What is your response to this notion?

**RKS:** There is always something to learn, even if one is a 'born' poet or artist. The problem with most poets writing today is: they don't want to learn. They think as they write in English, they are superior, even if they have no sense of form, rhythm, and even poetry.

**JS:** What is your opinion about poetry's relation with art and music?

**RKS:** Despite expressive, formal differences, each is moved by the same creative spirit; each creates a stirring within; each is rich in rhythm and a potent means of self expression and fulfillment. Poets, like musicians and painters, within their aesthetic frame, are performers; with their art and craft they seek perfection; they sensitize us about what is imperfect; they try to create from the fullness of their heart, and convince us of the truthfulness of their lies.

**JS:** What is your opinion about the people who strive to put poetry on its right footing and its prevailing less patronizing by the people in general?

**RKS:** In this period of science and information technology, all traditional arts have suffered. Poetry is no exception. The issues of its little utilitarian worth for the consumerist new cosmopolitans and relevance in the emerging knowledge society should throw up new patrons who might rediscover the sociocultural worth of belle letters vis-à-vis the proliferation of technological artifacts and the technologically driven new world of work.

**JS:** What is your suggestion to put forth attempts to give poetry its due as a respectful status it deserves?

**RKS:** Free it from the politics of power, awards and honours; save it from being institutionalized.

**JS: What does poetry mean to you?**

**RKS:** Self-awareness and a means of inner liberation. It is an extension of my self which I recreate variously. Its effect lies in the thrill, the almost physical emotion that comes with its reading and writing.

To me it is also a means to defy the disgusting socio-political world outside. It's a form of actively resisting political manipulation by turning inward. But this does not mean being cerebral, sermonizing, or too idealistic.

**JS:** As a genre of literature poetry deserves regeneration. What, according to you, will be positive attitude towards poetry to allow it to be somber in contents and revelations?

**RKS:** Contents and revelation in poetry are something dependent on the poet's individual talent, sensibility and capacity to absorb the new aesthetic trends the world over. One must be able to appeal to ones time rather than look for what is missing. I am confident my taste for poetry, if I have any, won't carry on down to my children or grandchildren. One can't be prescriptive about such things. At present I think a new *aesthesia*, to use a term Sri Aurobindo used, in tune with technological innovations, should be evolving. The media technologies have already shifted the balance from literate forms of cultural productions to a revamped orality and visuality. Therefore, all we can do now is to be open-minded, tolerant, patient, and discerning.

**JS:** Poetry does not get adequate patronage as a part of educational curriculum. If at all some poetry is there, interesting poetry does not find a place. What do you think about it?

**RKS:** As a teacher for thirty years I know no student likes to read what is prescribed in a syllabus, largely because most syllabuses are uninspiring, boring, and killing the innate creativity among learners. Personally, if you want to kill a poet, prescribe his poetry in a textbook!

Unless the academic administrators, curriculum planners and teachers change their mindset, teaching of any subject, including poetry, will prove self-defeating and disappointing. Nobody seems to be concerned about students' creative interest, you know.

**JS:** How would you like to differentiate between classical poetry and modern poetry?

**RKS:** Such distinctions are hardly relevant now if I am thinking in terms of poetry's symbiosis with the new media or reflecting on literature's very survival which ultimately depends on human values and on human beings' capacity to respond accordingly. If you want to regenerate poetry, then you should be talking about poetry's human dimension to which young mind can be sensitized. Let's leave scholasticism, this academic distinction between classical and modern, behind us and think about how poetry should be presented to students in schools, colleges and universities.

**JS:** Some poets, including you, stress more on expressing feelings of sex in poetry. Don't you think it is an unhealthy trend because of its denigration?

**RKS:** Expression of sex in my poetry has been a gradual evolution. (I doubt I deliberately compose a poem with explicit sexual content or seek to offend taste.) Sex is just one of the many aspects of my creativity. Physically, sex is a way to experience new ways to love and feel loved, to express a sense of delight, understand human body. Poetically, it's a way to express feelings, to feel valued, and to explore relationships, concerns and roles; to seek inner balance, a release from self as much as from others, to build beauty and meaning out of a pressing sense of inner emptiness.

It is not unhealthy but basic to my social vision: love of the self through exploration of the body leads to love of the divine, or man and woman as one. Also, it is perhaps in the area of sex that one must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual or his/her social consciousness.

In fact, the problem is not sex but social attitude, morality, hypocrisy, the sociosexual standard that determine 'civilized' norms, that discriminate, enchain and debase honest aspiration as lust or vulgarity. I react against false ethical and cultural values, against hypocrisy.

**JS:** What are your favourite topics for discussion in poetry?

**RKS:** I am realistic and try to present facts: Maybe, sometimes I am misunderstood but the themes of spiritual search, an attempt to understand myself and the world around me, social injustice and disintegration, human suffering, degradation of relationship, political corruption, fundamentalism, hollowness of urban life and its false values, prejudices, loneliness, sex, love, irony etc are prominent in my poetry. In my lyrics, haiku and tanka, natural and human co-mingle to reveal my way of seeing the world. I become my own veil and revelation.

**JS:** Do you feel poetry can be a means for fighting desperation in life?

**RKS:** Yes, if one is internally able to outgrow the external impacts. One can sublimate ones desperation. It is through the inner mindscape that the outer awareness is interpreted.

**JS:** Can poetry become a means of revolutionizing literature and society in the present context?

**RKS:** I doubt, I can't recall poetry has ever changed any situation anywhere in the world. It might inhere or assimilate a situation, social or literary, but it can't change it.

**JS:** As an academician what's your opinion about the role of poetry in moulding the society?

**RKS:** It can at best create some awareness, hone some finer feelings, present specialist perceptions, reflect one's mind and soul, and remain part of cultural activities and a form of literary communication, but I doubt poetry can mould a society by itself. As an academic, I must admit practicing poetry or literary scholarship has not directly marketable utilitarian function, and its teaching is pure altruism on behalf of the common good. Professionally, it doesn't help in saving

lives, winning war, or cases in court. But reading it could be liberating to those who can grasp what is at issue.

**JS:** Sir, I profusely thank you for responding to these questions.

**RKS:** Thank you. It's my pleasure.

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**Jaswinder Singh** is a Delhi based columnist, poet and reviewer.

## 13.

### **Sex is a strategy to react to a situation**

#### **Dr. R.K. Singh in an interview with Scolomaniac**

**Scolomaniac (SC):** Could you tell us something about modern poetry?

**Dr.R.K.Singh (RK):** It has been a movement and we don't know in how many ways people really think about modern poetry. It was for a definite period as also for distinct formal characteristics that it was called modern, but we possibly at this moment can't identify with the modern poetry as such. It is the contemporary poetry which we are associated with. What had been modern at one time is no more. It is recent poetry or current poetry we can associate ourselves with. Modern is used in this sense as well.

**SC:** What is the demarcation between the old and modern poetry? Is modern poetry, as someone likened it to be, a sort of escapism, where people find refuge in expressing themselves in whatever way they like without straining their vocabulary to follow norms of poetry?

**RK:** I don't think anyone really goes to creative writing because he is afraid of living his life and takes refuge in poetry. It is a matter of looking at the expression of poetry from psychological viewpoint. If we want to analyze the psychological make up of a person vis-à-vis what he is saying, if we see him in Freudian light, then you can possibly say that he is doing it (writing poetry) deliberately or he is possibly using it as a device. And not that he is an escapist. I don't think people write to escape from the realities of life... Rather, it is to face life that they write.

**SC:** When did you first start writing poetry?

**RK:** I think I started writing quite early, as a student, in Hindi when I was 12 or 13. In English, after passing B.A.? But more, while reading... You start reading and you feel that you can write something and then you start writing. Who don't feel (like writing), fail to write.

**SC:** Your poetry speaks a lot about what transpires between a man and a woman. Is it...?

**RK:** It is not that. It is about sex (not necessarily about husband and wife), and maybe that there's a good deal of sex experiments in these two collections, (*My Silence and Memories Unmemoried*), but it comes as an imagery, it has its own meaning in context and it has mythical references as well, though used in a very simplified way; it has been said naturally, but it also has an ironical effect on the present day society. Its simplicity is deceptive... Sex is used as a strategy to react to a situation you are in , and also to expose lots of things people are afraid of talking.... It is also in a way an attempt to transcend sex by an apotheosis of it. Sexual is not the problem, the problem is social attitudes, morality, hypocrisy.

**SC:** Is it to spit on the face of society's hypocrisy?

**RK:** It is one way to expose the hypocrisy that has become so much part of all of us. We may feel lots of things, but we are so afraid and hesitant to speak. Actually, everyone has to be honest to himself. And if you are talking about your self, your inner self, don't be afraid of saying what you feel. Boldly and as clearly as it comes to you, or as you can put it. I expose what lies dormant in this.

**SC:** Or does it help to boost the sale of your books?

**RK:** I don't think any of these publications had a commercial background, but of course it will easily appeal to people. And some of them may feel that here is something 'hot' and you possibly will be interested. I don't deny. But if someone analyses it technically or literary wise, it will be very difficult to pass any judgement on that score. Sex is a thing simplicity of which is very gullible. It is

not what it appears on the surface. Frankness is not a guilt. I offer it (sex) to challenge the contemporary values, like Kamala Das does.

**SC:** Is there any limit to this frankness?

**RK:** Well, it depends to what extent you feel for expression. Sky is the limit. There's no limit to it so long as it retains its poetic sense, so long as it has a meaning, it has an appeal. But, if it fails on these scores, it turns pornographic.

**SC:** Is your poetry for a select group of readers?

**RK:** I think everybody can read it.

**SC:** But don't you think it has a perverse effect on an adolescent mind, who can't get its inner meaning?

**RK:** They may feel that. But a thinking mind can always get what I want to convey. Simplicity has been my weapon as you can see from my pieces.

**SC:** What made you choose English as the medium of your work?

**RK:** Well, I think it came naturally to me. It wasn't something difficult to choose from. I write in English because ... because my sensibility is essentially international. And English is an international language which facilitates my expression in an appropriate medium.

**SC:** But, you call it Indian English?

**RK:** Yes, it is Indian to the extent I come from Indian culture, and express myself from within the most familiar culture. I communicate my Indianness—imagery, thought, tone, rhythm, argument etc—which is all incited by the Indian environment and sustained by the Indian society....Maybe, the medium distances

me from the larger masses (not knowing English) and to that extent I may appear elitist, but I am sure, I don't write for the illiterate people, even for the non-educated millions, because, to them, writing in any language, including native language I mean, will also mean nothing. After all, who'll read a poet or writer if one can't understand or one doesn't know reading?

English is my medium by choice, and I firmly believe it is a neutral medium too, therefore it serves my aesthetic needs well. I communicate to all those people who know and understand it the world over.

**SC:** But you can write in Hindi also?

**RK:** Not that I can't write in Hindi, my native language, but there are many things that I have found I couldn't express well in Hindi. English seemed more suitable, natural and convenient, I felt more at home with it.... I won't know whether what I wrote in the last ten years could be better said in Hindi. But when I tried to translate a couple of my poems in English I failed just as I failed to translate many of my English poems into Hindi.

**SC:** You talked of international...? and Indianness...?

**RK:** Yes, I understand what you want to ask. There is no contradiction. I turn international in my attitude and values, perhaps, in my secularism, in my belief in the equality and unity of mankind and sexes; in my love and tolerance for all the races, tribes, nationalities and languages; in my experience that human nature is the same everywhere, in my concerns that cut across national boundaries; in my acceptance of all the religions as manifestation of God; and in the spiritual oneness of people; in my desire not to live and die as a stranger, as a mere Indian (in the political sense) but as a man belonging to the whole world.

My poetry in English has not been so bad as several poems, novels and stories (that other Indians have written or are writing). I know that I don't sound unnatural when I write in English. But, it takes a long time to get accepted, whatever the medium one might be writing in... Moreover, for a creative person, poetry is

scattered all around. It is immaterial in which language it's expressed. It comes with a gush at certain moments of your lives. All you have to do is to catch those moments and channelize those gushes through your pen.

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Scolomaniac, a cultural body of ISM students, is represented by a group of students that interviewed me in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad

## **14.**

### **R.K. Singh, Poet Living in India**

#### **Based on an Interview with Sonja Van Kerkhoff**

It was in Varanasi that I became a Baha'i some 27 years ago and remained very active for over ten years. After that my academic commitments simply kept me from Baha'i activities. I am basically a poet, though by profession, I am a teacher: now as Professor and Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian School of Mines (ISM) in Dhanbad, I am deeply involved in English Language Teaching (ELT) and English for Science and Technology (EST), with several publications to my credit. I have tried to counter the deadly monotony of existence in the maze of routine at ISM through prayers and poetry. In the last nine years , I have published thirteen books, including five volumes of verses. Although I have not yet produced my best book or poem, I think books like *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic* (1984), *Indian English Writing: 1981-1985: Experiments with Expression* (ed. 1987), and *Recent Indian English Poets: Expressions and Beliefs* (ed. 1992) have accorded me a place of eminence in Indian English poetry criticism. As a leading ESTist in India, I have authored 85 academic papers and over 100 book reviews, three text books, including *Using English in Science and Technology* (1988). As a believer in the unity of humanity, I accept the spiritual oneness of people. I love all the world's races, tribes, nationalities, religions, and languages and my concerns, as a poet and teacher, cut across the national boundaries.

#### **My early years as a poet**

I remember writing my first poem in Hindi at the age of 12 in June 1962. The poem appeared in a Hindi daily of Banaras, where I was born and brought up. My interest in literary activities and enthusiasm never waned since then: I dabbled in several poems and published in newspapers and magazines. (I was so impressed by the sacrifices of Tahira in the Cause of Baha'u'llah that I adopted 'Tahira' as my pen-name in Hindi. I remember I used to do a column 'Tahira ki kalam se'

(From the pen of Tahira) in a weekly. I also published over 150 journalistic articles as well as around 10 stories in Hindi till 1971-72. As I became aware that my articles in Hindi were more popular than the poems, from 1968-69 I started writing in English as well, and produced a large number of third-rate verses. Probably the first poem in English composed in 1968 appeared in the *Deutsche Welle* (radio) magazine. Before the poem is lost forever, let me quote it for posterity:

This life  
like a butterfly  
from this flower to that  
from this garden to that  
and—  
in the dawn  
someone's hand  
catches its golden delighted feather  
without carrying off the pleasant weather  
extinguishes—  
its internal fire in a moment  
and creeps away  
having the marks of its shades.

A couple of my teachers in Banaras Hindu University, where I was a student from 1970-72 dissuaded me from writing verses in English but I persisted in my efforts at developing the art and craft of poetry in keeping with my sensibility, and I am happy to discover what I could not do in Hindi (which is indeed now very advanced and comparable with literature in any other country) I have been successful in doing in English.

### **Lyle Glazier's influence**

As the influence of the Romantic, Victorian and the so-called Modern poets in English waned, this phase of preparation was completed with my attempt at writing my 'diary' in verses from October 1972 to December 1973. My encounter in 1971-72 with poetry of the American poet-professor, Lyle Glazier (*Orchard Park and Istanbul*, 1965; *You Too*, 1969; *Voices of the Dead*, 1971; and *Dervishes*,

1971) had a strong effect on my poetic sensibility. It seems it has matured with my personal correspondence with Lyle Glazier, who is still my best poet-critic friend. There was a lot to feel and say after leaving the monotonous life at Varanasi and moving to Pulgaon, returning again and visiting several places (1972-1973), moving to Lucknow (1973), New Delhi (1973-1974), and finally to Bhutan where, from March 1974 to November 1975, I composed almost one poem a day.

### **From Journalism to Teaching**

I had been interested in journalism ever since my earlier days. I had worked with a couple of local presses in Varanasi as a student, and later with the Press Trust of India, New Delhi, for about six months but couldn't make much news. I didn't want to be a teacher but was finally obliged to accept teaching as a career. God gave me peace in the beautiful Himalayan kingdom in the Eastern part of Bhutan, where I had shifted to a teaching assignment and where, as I said earlier, I found the required dimension to my poetry and personality.

I came to Dhanbad (in February 1976) and lost my peace in the whirlwind of teacher activism, academic research and uncertainties of all sorts. My psyche was disturbed, but it was in the mounting tensions that I could perform my best: I wrote my Ph.D. thesis on the great Indian English poet-philosopher, Sri Aurobindo's massive epic, *Savitri* (1950). Later, the thesis was published as *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic*(1984), which I still consider as my best critical work so far.

### **Baha'u'llah and Sri Aurobindo**

While doing the thesis I discovered there is so much common between the Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution and the Baha'i concept of evolution. I don't remember whether it was Baha'u'llah or Abdul Baha who wrote that each person who is higher in the ascent of life is the means of helping those who are lower, and those who are highest of all are helpers of all humanity. It is as if all people were connected together by elastic cords. If a person rises a little above the general level of others, the cords tighten. His or her former companions tend to draw this person back, but with an equal force this person draws them

upward. The higher he or she gets, the more he or she feels the weight of the whole world pulling this person back, and the more dependent this person is on the divine support which can be felt through the few who are still above. Each of such individuals is a channel of God's bounty to every heart that would receive it. Each person has a part to play in the great plan of cosmic salvation through spiritual evolution.

Sri Aurobindo, "self-lost in the vast of God," sought to perfect and liberate human life through a process of descent from a higher world to a lower world and ascent from a lower world to a higher world, and fusing the process of transformation – evolution, involution and synthesis—upward, downward, and inward movement. He sought to recreate with his soul-force the essential oneness of humanity in harmony with the spirit in nature and the spirit of the universe. His concept of evolution was aimed at lifting humanity out of animal life up to the glories of spiritual existence, providing a spiritual process for realizing immortality within human culture: "Earth must transform herself and equal Heaven./ Or Heaven descend into earth's mortal state" (*Savitri*, p. 456). As a poet aware of universals, Sri Aurobindo thinks of evolution in terms of vigorous inner action which alone can effect lasting positive changes, ensuring a spiritual social order. I hope one day I should be able to do a comparative study on the philosophy of spiritual evolution advanced by Baha'u'llah, Abdul Baha and Sri Aurobindo. Let me come back to my art as a poet.

### **The Source of my inspiration**

In a sentence I can say that for the last few years my dreamt dreams, personal experiences with people in waking life, reading good writings or seeing a good painting have inspired my creativity, though some part is also played by the completely demotivating environment of campus life in Dhanbad. A deadly monotony of existence in the maze of routine is what characterizes a typical day in my life: while mentally it is a journey from loneliness to frustration, physically it criss-crosses the routine of living in the same house, working in the same place, meeting the same people, teaching batch after batch the same unwilling-to-learn students; the same time of rising, eating and sleeping, the same worries and

complaints, the same diseases, the same unfulfilled desires, the same uninspiring atmosphere; the same prayers, the same narrowing dimensions and captivation; the same insecurity and marginalization; and the same search for freedom; the same sense perception probing the self, city or people; and yet unable to know myself or to forget the growing depression. I have composed poems, mostly short poems (brief is beautiful, as they say) while walking, eating, taking a bath, just as I have written poems soon after getting up or even while reading a book or article. The source of creative inspiration has always been mysterious. There is a great spiritual satisfaction after completing a poem.

### **The process and style of creation**

I am afraid it's terribly complex. Some small, negligible aspect of one's behavior, or some insignificant event, or something read or heard in the past stays unconsciously in the memory and gets connected with some other time, which something incites me into a poem, or I get my own intuitions or thoughts when I read somebody else's poems, or I recollect some complex experiences into the garb of a poem. I see to it that the emotion thus expressed makes sense to me as an ordinary reader (or critic), and there is no claptrap in the form of a poem.

The rains  
cry to meet earth  
fall from sky day and night  
remind love always yields to arms  
open

I also check whether there is some sort of rhythm or pattern in the expression in poetry, and also try to avoid adjectives. Since the poetic mood is *short lived*, the poems are almost always short, and lyrical too. That's why there is preponderance of 'haiku' form. As there is hardly a poem composed with a title integral to it, I prefer not to give titles to my poems. Also, titles tell too much: I believe in the autonomy of readers who must read and recreate a poem's meaning according to their own intellectual potency, taste and sensibility without any suggestions or comments from the poet(or critic). I hold that even giving a title to the poem is to interfere with the readers' freedom of imagination. I love my poem's poem's exposure to different kinds/levels of meaning. To aid this process, I use

enjambment, as a critic pointed out: one line passes on to the next with or without punctuation at the end or the first word of the next line gets to play a double role:

No one sings these days  
songs don't come easily  
life has lost music

and

Bones of levity criss-cross  
at the bottom of silence  
there is no shape in the mind

or

The room has her presence  
every minute I feel  
she speaks in my deep  
silently in my silence

I try to inter-knit lines with as much deep-seated meaning as poetically possible.  
My contents are often complex though apparently they look simple.

The fig of life with  
roots above and branches below:  
man and woman one

and

Roots are infected  
no water can green balsam  
the pot is flower's grave

I am realistic and try to present facts: Maybe, sometimes I am not palatable but I don't think the aesthetic appeal is reduced. The themes of spiritual search, an attempt to understand myself and the world around me, social injustice and disintegration, human suffering, degradation of relationship—political corruption, fundamentalism, hollowness of urban life and its false values, prejudices, loneliness, sex, love, irony etc are prominent.

Is it love for ritual  
or the ritual waste:  
every year they steal light  
to illumine puja pandals

and blare non-stop nasty songs  
the whole night disturb peace  
show power at its lowest  
but the goddess keeps mum  
perhaps self-loathingly  
sleeps for demons to write histories  
not fit for the light of day  
or for me. Self-pity  
is no wisdom when I yield  
to pressure and visit  
places I hate  
I'm sorry my goddess and I  
stare in two directions;  
who cares for the burning

in my heart now  
night frustrates like day  
with the ashes of insight  
I create verses  
and learn to rest restlessly  
coughing, sitting or sniffing  
her crotch like a dog  
but nothing ceases  
in the air only wounded  
senses and high decibel  
noise nobody feels  
I touch her yet  
she doesn't respond to my need

I would never like my poems to be explored in terms of autobiography, for fact and fiction are so fused in my brief personal poems, one would succeed only in distorting and reaching wrong conclusions.

### **Contemporary Indian English Poetry**

Though contemporary Indian English poetry is growing up as part of collective tradition, most of its young practitioners are virtually unmindful of form and rhythm. What is needed is a sense of refinement in articulation of thoughts with an ear for music. Experimentation at various levels too is needed. If conceited practitioners could free themselves of the ghost of 'foreign language' they are constantly haunted by, I am sure, the process of its evolution will be hastened with the resultant emergence of a real Indian English poem. My own experience as a

reader convinces me that our poetry is quite capable of standing with the poetry written in English anywhere.

## Writing in English

Why should I write in English, which is spoken by hardly 2% to 3% of India's total population? English is my medium by choice. I firmly believe it is a neutral medium, too, and it serves my aesthetic needs well. With the passage of time it has become a 'natural' medium to express myself. Moreover, as my sensibility is essentially international and cosmopolitan, English as an international medium facilitates my expression. And, it is Indian English to the extent I come from Indian culture, just as I express myself from within the most familiar culture, communicating my broad Indianness—imagery, thought, tone, rhythm, argument etc—which is all sustained by the Indian environment.

### Indian English

Harmony in duality  
is unity of tongues  
to sculpt new dreams

made of living rock  
we aren't different  
in our same land:

our poems are woven  
from the same skein of language  
weathered by time and nature

## Baha'i sensibility

Both as a Baha'i and Indian, I believe in the whole world and humanity as a family, *vasudahaiv kutumbakam*, as pronounced in the ancient Indian texts; recognize the world as one earth, one nation, one country. Just as I love all the world's races, tribes, nationalities, religions and languages, I accept the spiritual oneness of people, and my concerns cut across narrow national boundaries. As a Baha'I world citizen, I try to practice the principle of harmony in my consciousness and am secular in my attitude and values. I try to live without

prejudices of any kind but it is almost tearing my psyche when I see all around me the ugly dance of religious intolerance and fundamentalism, ethnic, casteist and communal violence, rigidity and narrowness of attitude and behavior, degradation of human dignity, political and moral turpitude, and the suicidal urge for self-destruction. I often feel I don't belong to the place or people here.

It's no use testing blood  
for asthmatic wheezing

dust of alienness  
has thickened on my throat

patches in the x-ray  
reveal I'm still foreign

I don't expect kind words  
in my own country

my heart lacerates  
I cough wordless plaints

I don't know to what extent poetry provided a healing touch to my tortured sensitivities but it seems I seek an 'escape' from the ugly outer existence by turning inward and personal in writing on subjects that are aesthetically more satisfying.

### **Feeling neglected**

I regret, the way of the world is such, that despite my poetic and critical output over the last twenty years, neither the academia nor the literary/poetic establishments in India have taken note of me, perhaps because I don't belong to any coteries? Or, I don't fit in with any groups? Or, have no access to the deans of 'backslapping bands' (as my friend, Norman Simms at the University of Waikato in New Zealand would say)? Though I am widely anthologized and I have been published in over 60 non-commercial magazines all over the world, have five collections to my credit, besides five books on Indian English poetry criticism, I

feel I am unduly neglected by the ‘big’ people who matter in literary circles in India.

### **Support for publication**

All these years that I have written or published poetry or criticism, I got no support from any agency or institution, including the university where I work. But I must say I was lucky when I needed a break. I found a publisher who brought out my book, *Savitri: A Spiritual Epic* (Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot), which gave me a critical standing and indirectly helped me in getting my first collection of poems, *My Silence* (1985) published by Poets Press India, Madras. Later, when I contacted the editor of *Poetry Time* (Berhampur) to bring out a special issue of his magazine, carrying a collection of my poems, he readily obliged me and thus *Memories Unmemoried* (1988), my second collection, was born. The manuscript for my third collection, *Music Must Sound* (1990), was finished soon after the appearance of *My Silence* in 1985 but it could not see the light despite promises by a couple of publishers. In the mean time the poems, like the poet, were getting old with every passing year, itching my memory, perhaps not without the awareness of very limited outlets for reaching the hands of readers. So in 1990 I decided to stencil a collection of 90 poems to produce over 200 stapled copies for distribution and review. In the same year, the editor of *Poetry Time* offered to publish yet another collection of my poems on the condition I shared the cost of publication and brought out the fourth collection *Flight of Phoenix* (1990). A year later, I proposed to the publisher and managing editor of *Creative Forum*, to start a series of poetry, the ‘CF New Poets Series’, under my general editorship and he readily agreed. This was the opportunity for me to appear jointly with U.S. Bahri in a special edition of *Creative Forum*, and thus, another collection, *I Do Not Question*, by R.K.Singh/Ujjal Singh Bahri (1993) came into being.

## No commercial success

Though I think I have existence as a poet, I have had no monetary success. For no big publisher with a good distribution network has yet come forward to publish my poetry. I have also proposed to bring out my Collected Poems (comprising of the five published volume plus some new/unpublished poems) to several commercial publishers but so far without any positive assurance. Some poet-critic friends have mentioned me in their articles on contemporary Indian English poetry, but I am afraid a serious note of my poetic work is yet to be taken by Indian critics and scholars, who seem to look Westward before recognizing a talent in their own land.

Personally I suspect I have been at a position of disadvantage working in a technical university: Had I been located in a mainstream university or in a big city I might have made my impact (as a poet or critic) felt more vigorously with easy access to nationally important journals, their editors, critics and reviewers who raise or lower the index of an artist in the literary stock exchange anywhere.

## Editing: to promote New Talent

It was perhaps in reaction that in 1986 I accepted the co-editorship of *Creative Forum*, a quarterly journal of contemporary literary writing from New Delhi. I wanted to promote ‘new’ talents and help all those unrecognized authors who had merit. I myself wrote articles on several less known and deliberately ignored poets just as I accepted critical appreciation of new authors. I wanted to start a movement and I am happy that within three years the desired trend was noticed in several other small journals where a few academic contributors wrote articles on fresh promising poets and writers. I edited or guest-edited special issues of *Language Forum* and *Creative Forum* with my introductory to exclusively highlight the achievements of a number of unknown or less known, young and old poets, story writers and novelists. To promote the cause of young talents, I also agreed to join the editorial boards/advisory committees of about half-a-dozen other small magazines, most of which are still active. This has indeed given me some satisfaction and respectability in the eyes of all those poets and writers who had been feeling neglected for years. I, too, have got some dividends in the process: Most of the non-commercial poetry magazines have been readily publishing my

poems, and a few have even published some articles on my poetry. I got favourable reviews of my poetry volumes everywhere, declaring me a leading poet and critic. All this is perhaps part of the process of self-actualization, isn't it? But I must say I have successfully utilized my time and opportunities: professionally working as an English language teacher I developed my career in the area of English for Science and Technology (EST) on the one hand, and gradually evolved my personal interests in literary practices as an Indian English poet and critic, on the other.

### **Baha'i involvement**

Academic and administrative responsibilities both at the departmental and institutional levels have kept me from Baha'i activities in Bihar. I don't know if Dhanbad has any Baha'i group and I have never succeeded in creating one ever since I came here in 1976. But the Baha'i ideals that had made an impact on me in my early years have always guided my thinking. I always kept in touch with the NSA in New Delhi, whether I worked in Lucknow, New Delhi, or Deothang (E. Bhutan) and, despite digressions of all sorts, reminded myself that I was a Baha'i, and therefore, different from the rest.... I became a Baha'i in 1966 or 1967 when I learnt about the Faith by accident; I found an empty envelope with the address of National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of India, near the notice board in my college in Varanasi (I was a student in standard eleven then) and I wrote a letter to them. I got some literature on Baha'i Faith and was convinced I believed in the basic tenets, and therefore instantly signed my declaration. In those days I was also studying Bible courses and Hindu scriptures, and I discovered my essential nature was Baha'i. When I came in contact with Mrs Gloria Faizi (wife of the late Hand of the Cause, A.Q. Faizi), perhaps the most inspiring Baha'i I have ever met, my faith deepened. I used to call her 'aunty'. She always comforted me when I was restless.

When I visited Birmingham in 1982, I felt a sense of belonging; a sense of community, in the company of the few Baha'i friends I was introduced to by the Secretary of the local assembly there. The greatest excitement came in 1987 when

Anneke Buys, reading one of my poems in a magazine discovered that I was a Baha'i and wrote me a long letter.

I seek the roots that shape  
my desperate cries, my bones  
that ache in bed I image  
the snakes in forgotten heritage  
to weave delight with Baha'i mind  
and prayers in English before Kali  
stand out alone with psalms  
or Tablet of Ahmad, perhaps  
I cross-breed in soul

but, who hears or sees  
the ancient hands that signed  
the first poems for man?  
I sound strange, and strange I am  
moving about among ventricles  
my anonymity with names

We have been in touch with each other, more as poets than as Baha'is: Poetry brought us together. I could see how my Baha'i mind could appeal to poets concerned with unity of humanity everywhere! I am happy even if I am not active as a Baha'i here, my literary activities, which are not devoid of Baha'i sensibility, can be seen as my service to the Faith as well.

[First published as Interview, with Sonja van Kerckhoff, 'R.K.Singh, Poet living in India,' edited by her in *Baha'i Association for Arts Newsletter* ( Apeldoorn, The Netherlands), No. 28, June/July 1994, Rahmat 151, pp. 16-19]

## **LIST OF BOOKS PUBLISHED BY Professor (Dr) R.K.SINGH:**

1. **Savitri: A Spiritual Epic.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1984, pp. 164. (A critical study of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*).
2. **Krishna Srinivas: A Poet of Inner Aspiration.** Madras: Poets Press India, 1984, pp. 30. (A Monograph).
3. **My Silence.** Madras: Poets Press India, 1985, pages 44. (A collection of poems).
4. **Using Contemporary English Idioms .** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1985-86, pages 133. (A text-cum-workbook).
5. **Sound and Silence.** Madras: Poets Press India, 1986, pages 160. (A collection of critical articles on the poetry of Krishna Srinivas, edited with an introduction).
6. **Indian English Writing: 1981-1985: Experiments with Expression.** New Delhi: Bahri Publications Pvt Ltd., 1987, rept. 1991, pages 168. (A collection of critical articles, edited with an introduction).
7. **Using English in Science and Technology.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1988, pages 256. (A textbook).
8. **Memories Unmemoried.** Berhampur: Poetry Time Publications, 1988, pages 24. (A collection of poems).
9. **Practising English in Science and Technology.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1990, pages 198. (An EST practice book ).
10. **Music Must Sound.** Dhanbad: R.K.Singh, 1990 (A stenciled collection of poems).
11. **Flight of Phoenix.** Berhampur: Poetry Time Publications, 1990, pages 35. (A Collection of Poems).

- 12. Recent Indian English Poets: Expressions and Beliefs.** New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1992, pages 192. (A collection of critical articles edited with Introduction).
- 13. Two Poets:** R.K.Singh (*I DO NOT QUESTION*) Ujjal Singh Bahri (*THE GRAMMAR OF MY LIFE*).New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1994, pages 83. (edited two collections of poems, including my own, pp.44).
- 14. General English Practice.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1995, pages 192. ( A textbook on Comprehension, Precis, Summary, Letter, Sentence, and Paragraph Writing).
- 15. Writing Your Thesis and Research Papers.**Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1996, pages 115. (A reference-cum-textbook on research writing).
- 16. My Silence and Other Selected Poems: 1974-1994.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1996, pages 185. (A collection of poems, including earlier volumes).
- 17. Anger in Action: Explorations of Anger in In Writing in English.** New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1997, pages 238. (A collection of critical articles – edited with an Introduction).
- 18. Above the Earth's Green.** Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1997, pages 126.(A collection of poems).
- 19. Psychic Knot : Search for Tolerance in Indian English Fiction.** New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 1998, pages 211. ( A collection of critical articles – edited with an Introduction ).
- 20. New Zealand Literature : Some Recent Trends.** New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 1998, pages 138. ( A collection of critical articles- edited with an Introduction ).
- 21. Every Stone Drop Pebble.** New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 1999, pages 70. (A collection of Haiku jointly with Catherine Mair and Patricia Prime).
- 22. Using English in Science and Technology.** Bareilly : Prakash Book Depot, 2000, pages 296. ( Fully revised and expanded second edition).

- 23 **Multiple Choice General English for UPSC Competition** . Bareilly : Prakash Book Depot, 2001, pages 204. ( A textbook on objective type General English for UPSC tests ).
24. **Cover to Cover: A collection of Poems** (R K Singh : *The Face in All Seasons*, pp 43). New Delhi : Bahri Publications, 2002. ( A Collection of Poems jointly with Ujjal Singh Bahri).
25. **Pacem in Terris.** Trento, Italy: Edizioni Universum, 2003. (A trilogy collection of poems in English and Italian, jointly with Myriam Pierri and Giovanni Campisi, including my haiku collection,*Peddling Dream*, pages 63-88)
26. **Communication in English: Grammar and Composition.** Bareilly : Prakash Book Depot, 2003, pages 148. ( A textbook on grammar and composition ).
27. **Sri Aurobindo's Savitri : Essays on Love, Life and Death.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2005, pages 176.(Critical essays ).
28. **Teaching English for Specific Purposes : An Evolving Experience.** Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2005, pages 289. (A Collection of research articles and review essays).
29. **For a World Peace.** ( jointly with Renza Agnelli and Danae G. Papastraton).Rocca di Caprileone(ME): Edizioni Universum, 2005, pages 28.(Collection of poems).
30. **Voices of the Present: Critical Essays on Some Indian English Poets.** Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2006, pages 267.(Collection of critical articles).
31. **The River Returns.** Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2006, pages 86. (A collection of tanka and haiku).
32. **English as a Second Language: Experience into Essays.** Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2007, pages 308. (An edited collection of essays).
33. **English Language Teaching: Some Aspects Recollected.** Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2008, pages 238. (An edited collection of essays).

34. **Sexless Solitude and Other Poems**. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2009, pages 86. (Collection of poems).
35. **Mechanics of Research Writing**. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2010, pages 182. (A reference book on research writing).
36. **Sense and Silence: Collected Poems**. Jaipur: Yking Books. 2010. Pages 338. (All previously published collections of poems with some new poems, haiku, and tanka).
37. **Using English in Science and Technology**. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2010, pages 336. (Third revised and updated edition).
38. **New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku**. New Delhi: Authors Press, 2012, pages 96. (collection of poems).
39. **Indian Poetry in English: In Search of Identity**. New Delhi: Authors Press, 2012, pages 303. (edited collection of essays, jointly with Rajni Singh).
40. **I Am No Jesus and Other Selected Poems, Tanka and Haiku**. Iasi: Editura StudIS, 2014, pages 52. (collection of poems with translation into Crimean Tatar by Taner Murat and Illustrations by Alsou Shikhova Ildarovna).
41. **You Can't Scent Me and Other Selected Poems**. New Delhi: AuthorsPress, 2016, pages 114. (collection of poems).
42. **Writing Editing Publishing: A Memoir**. Iasi: Editura StudIS, 2016, Pages 296. ( a collection of letters).
43. **God Too Awaits Light**. California: Cholla Needles, 2017, pp. 66 (a collection of tanka-haiku poems).
44. **Growing Within: Haiku Tanka and Other Poems**. Constanta: Anticus Press, 2017, pp. 290 (A bilingual collection of poems, with translation into Romanian by Alexandra Flora Munteanu and Taner Murat).

### ***About the Poet***

**Ram Krishna Singh**, born, brought up and educated in Varanasi, is a retired university professor whose main fields of interest consist of Indian English writing, especially poetry, and English for Specific Purposes, especially for science and technology. He has taught English language skills to UG and PG students of earth and mineral sciences and engineering for about four decades.

He has authored more than 160 research articles, 170 book reviews and 44 books, including 18 collections of poems. Some of his poems have been translated into French, Spanish, Romanian, Albanian, Crimean Tatar, Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Irish, Chinese, Japanese, Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, Bulgarian, Italian, German, Portuguese, Greek, Esperanto, Hindi, Punjabi, Kannada, Tamil, and Bangla.

His poetry has been explored for doctoral and postgraduate studies, over 80 research articles, and four full length books, namely *New Indian English Poetry: An Alternative Voice* (ed. I.K. Sharma, 2004), *R.K. Singh's Mind and Art: A Symphony of Expressions* (ed. Rajni Singh, 2011), *Critical Perspectives on the Poetry of R.K.Singh, D.C.Chambial and I.K.Sharma* (ed. K.V. Dominic, 2011) and *Anger in Contemporary Indian English Poetry* (Vijay Vishal, 2014) which present a comprehensive picture of his creativity since the 1970s. Professor Singh's biobibliography appears in some 35 publications in the UK, USA, India and elsewhere.

A member of several organizations and editorial boards, Professor Singh is a recipient of many awards and honours, including an Honorary LittD from the World Academy of Arts & Culture, Taiwan, 1984, Fellowship of the International Writers and Artists Association, USA, 1988, Michael Madhusudan Award, Kolkata, 1994, Ritsumeikan University Peace Museum Award, Kyoto, 1999, Certificate of Honour and Nyusen Prize, Kumamoto, 2000, 2008, Universal Peace Ambassador, 2006, Lifetime Achievement Award, Chennai, 2009, distinguished membership of the IAPWA, Albania, 2012, Prize of Corea Literature, Korea, 2013, Special Award Diogen, 2013, Nazar Look Prize for Poetry, Romania, 2013, Nomination for Pushcart Prize, 2013, 2014, Naji Naaman's Literary Prize, 2015,

Aichi Prefecture Board of Education Award, Japan, 2015 , and Ambassador of Naaman pour la Culture, Lebanon, 2016.

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